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Arts Council ballet policy review

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ARTS COUNCIL BALLET POLICY REVIEW

November 2013

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2006 the Arts Council commissioned an independent review of the context and issues affecting professional ballet in Ireland. The findings were subsequently collated in a policy paper entitled *Towards a Strategy of Support for Professional Ballet in Ireland*, which was published in 2007 and adopted by the Council in the same year. The report acknowledged ballet as an integral part of cultural life and its importance to the development of many forms of professional dance. The document set forth a number of recommendations that have since formed the basis of art-form policy and funding relationships with ballet organisations.

In parallel since then, a number of important changes have taken place within the ballet sector. Some of these changes are the inevitable consequences of these difficult financial times. However, despite these funding challenges, the sector has managed to retain its vibrancy and popularity with national audiences. While the sector continues to evolve, the limited financial resources available to the Council have become an obstacle to implementing the road map envisioned in 2007. Given its significance and popularity, ballet remains an extraordinarily underdeveloped art form in Ireland. A key weakness of the sector is that future development of ballet provision remains fundamentally uncertain and is still overly dependent on the personal and professional commitment of a few individuals.

This review aims to analyse the current situation, discuss and consider how matters might be progressed and to propose a comprehensive framework for the development of ballet in Ireland. The purpose of the review is to provide an objective point of reference for the Arts Council's medium-term ballet policy and to inform and guide future public investment in the art form. The review also intends to progress the work undertaken since 2007 in response to the document *Towards a Strategy of Support for Professional Ballet in Ireland*.

Within a wider perspective, the review is expected to provide compelling evidence of ballet's relevance to Irish cultural life. It will also create an opportunity for the Council to engage with relevant stakeholders with a view to addressing the challenge of how best to provide for ballet on a sustainable basis within the context of a changed financial environment and an evolving professional sector. There is reason to expect this review will also assist the sector in giving voice to its aspirations and needs. This would certainly assist the Council in garnering support for a blueprint for the consolidation of professional ballet practice and education in Ireland.

It is envisioned the ballet policy review will be closely aligned to the Arts Council's own high-level objectives and will take account of developments that may arise from the broader process of strategic review the Council will undertake in 2014.

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This report aims to bring these factors to the fore and actively seek to find solutions to current shortcomings, with a view to improving and advancing the art form in this country. The study examines Ireland's current ballet landscape, suggests solutions to challenges and provides an integrated framework to enable progress. The review should also be regarded as a reference document for the Arts Council's medium-term ballet policy and to provide information and guidance for future public investment in the art form.

The main body of this review is divided into four chapters:

1. Historical Context
2. Education
3. An Audience Perspective
4. Professional Practice

Included at the end of the study, in appendix form, are meeting notes recorded as part of the consultation process with many of the main actors in Ireland's ballet sector.

Historical Context

The history of ballet in Ireland reflects a long and rich tradition, dating back to the period when it first emerged in Europe around the middle of the 17th century. Its ongoing practice has contributed to our cultural and aesthetic development down to the present day. Despite its significance, it could be argued that ballet in Ireland has remained somewhat underdeveloped due to a combination of factors that have impeded the full realisation of its potential.

Education

The major conclusions pertaining to the development of dance education and formal training in Ireland (covered in Chapter 2) identify three areas of need and suggest these should now be addressed:

- Dance should be repositioned within the arts education curriculum as a discrete subject within primary and secondary level education, (as is the case with, for example, music and drama). The current practice of presenting dance as an optional strand of the physical education curriculum should be discontinued.
- There should be a new approach to providing state support for professional dance training
- Professional training in dance should be positioned as a formally accredited Bachelor of Arts programme within the higher education system. A detailed model is proposed, including reference to the need for quality assurance and accreditation bodies to ensure such programmes are delivered to the highest international standards.

An Audience Perspective

Chapter 3 identifies the need to establish appropriate structures or systems for both data collection and audience research. To introduce effective systems, it will be essential to measure change and progress both at local and national levels. Other recommendations include the need to address three particular issues:

- Increased public awareness and a higher profile for ballet could be achieved by investing in skills development within ballet companies, developing more collaborative partnerships and increased focus on communication strategies that strengthen company branding
- A more diverse audience could be developed if ballet companies and venues together took a strategic approach to presenting a more diversified programme
- The Irish ballet sector must act collectively and work together to put strategies in place to will support and develop attendances and engagement at both participatory activities and performances

Professional Practice

Significant improvement in the quality of professional practice in this country will require a step change in the level of the available financial resources and, commensurately, a level of artistic ambition capable of taking the art form forward through creative practice.

This final chapter considers what constitutes best professional practice and discusses how these observations might provide possible and suitable options for developing practice in Ireland. Noting that the current level of public funding for dance lags behind the equivalent investment in other areas of the performing arts, the report suggests additional funding would act as a catalyst by prompting the attitudinal shift required to move the art form forward. Further recommendations include:

- Based on findings of the research undertaken for this study, there is a case for directing resources into supporting a single (national) ballet company
- The provision of an outline description of a potential model for an Irish ballet company, including consideration of the implications for financial resourcing, staffing and artistic programming issues (a decision to pursue such an option would first require, among other things, further detailed consideration of the feasibility of such a model).
- There is a need for Irish ballet practitioners to encompass the full range of the art form in their programmes (i.e. to include new works, innovative ballets by established choreographers and traditional full-length classics)

By undertaking this review, the Arts Council has brought many key issues pertaining to Irish ballet to the fore. Its aim has been to identify options that, if implemented over a realistic timeframe, would develop ballet in Ireland.

However, given the scope of the proposed changes and suggested interventions as well as their potentially far-reaching implications, it is essential to acknowledge that the Arts Council does not have the necessary resources to act alone. It is therefore envisioned that any effective course of action will need to be devised in partnership with other key stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 Chapter introduction

Ballet has captivated audiences for centuries. The Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and more recently the Technological Revolution and the Information Age, have all helped to shape development of the art of ballet. In turn, ballet has intersected with cultural ideals, political events and social and economic changes across many countries and continents. The history of ballet is characterised both by its continual evolution and its abiding popularity¹.

This chapter begins with a high-level overview of the origins of ballet and its historical transformations, followed by a summary of the place and relevance of ballet in contemporary society. As well as looking at the two main ways of funding ballet companies around the world, this chapter also provides a brief history of ballet in Ireland and its key developments.

1.2 A brief overview of ballet history

Ballet's origins can be traced to the Renaissance courts in what is now modern-day Italy. It was a time of great cultural and political ferment with profound intellectual influences on the development of early European modern history. In this sense, ballet's early developments took place against the backdrop of a period defined by highly refined aesthetic canons and intricate relationships between governments. The fiercely competitive city states soon realised that great art had the power to enhance their reputations both in the eyes of their citizens and the world at large. Italian courts therefore often vied with each other in fostering the arts, attracting brilliant minds and producing magnificent spectacles. From these Italian kingdoms, such spectacles spread to the royal court of France and evolved into court ballet during the late 16th century. Originally performed by the nobility in their palaces and gardens, court ballet was a mixture of dance, music, verse and design. These elaborate productions were used to display the wealth and power of the state and to celebrate royal marriages. The dance element was based on the social dances of the royal courts, with graceful upper-body movements and elegant floor patterns. It is interesting to note the lack of distinction between "social" and "theatrical" dance in this period. The capacity to participate in graceful, intricate court dances was an essential requirement for the nobility. Therefore, professional dance masters were hired to teach both dance technique and etiquette (such as the way to speak properly, walk or conduct oneself in social settings). Later, dancing masters were sought by a much broader range of people and did much to spread the principles of grace and beauty that are still very much present in contemporary society, including Ireland. In the 17th century – particularly during the reign of Louis XIV- ballet progressively developed into a professional art form. This was helped greatly by the establishment of the *Académie Royale de Musique et de Danse*, which was responsible for training professional dancers and licensing ballet masters. During this period the art form also gradually evolved from performances in palaces into theatres. By the latter half of the 18th century, prompted by the work and writings of French ballet master Jean Georges Noverre, ballet had become an independent art form performed in public theatres throughout Europe.

As with music, literature and the visual arts, ballet was greatly influenced by Romanticism. New advancements in the art, such as the development of *pointe* technique, greater attention to music and a focus on expression helped to prepare the dancers for the demands ushered in by the two most important productions of the romantic ballet era: *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*. As the 19th century drew to a close, ballet's popularity in Russia grew, supported by the extensive resources of the tsars. The

¹ Dance literature is enriched with many publications presenting a comprehensive evolution and development of ballet. Three reference books that may be recommended are: S. Au (2012), *Ballet and Modern Dance*, Thames and Hudson, London, C. Carol (2002), *Ballet in Western Culture*, Routledge, London, and J. Homans (2010) *Apollo's Angels*, Granta, London

ballets created during this period by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, such as *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, showcase classical ballet in its grandest form.

A company called the Ballets Russes was responsible for enhancing the art form in Western Europe. Founded in 1909 under the direction of the impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, this peripatetic company promoted ground-breaking artistic collaboration among leading artists such as Mikhail Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, Pablo Picasso and Igor Stravinsky. The resulting works were dynamic, innovative and reflective of the time. During the brief 20 year lifespan, it transformed the notion of ballet as an aristocratic art form into one characterised by audiences of unprecedented scale and diversity.

Ballet and contemporary dance have had a deep and interconnected relationship dating back to the early 1900s. Contemporary dance had a notable influence on the technical advancement of 20th century ballet (ballet has reciprocated and acted as a point of reference in the formation of contemporary dance idioms). Choreographers, such as George Balanchine and Robert Joffrey, developed hybrid forms of ballet that did not observe the strict tenets of classical technique but drew from contemporary dance, as well as jazz and ethnic dance idioms to create innovative works. The sheer physical energy generated by these works astonished audiences and gave ballet a new perspective. Today, there is a current generation of choreographers who have reinterpreted classicism, infused it into their work and created seminal post-structural works that transcend both ballet and the contemporary dance canon.

The quality and diversity of professional training available today also reflects these developments. Indeed, professional ballet training plays an important role in expanding the boundaries of the art form. Consequently, many schools, conservatoires and universities offer vigorous preparatory programmes to meet these technical expectations. This symbiotic relationship between recent choreographic trends and ballet pedagogy, in turn, keeps the technique evolving. In addition, many professional ballet-training programmes have adapted a more holistic approach to training and the result is often a more creative, versatile and analytical dance artist. Perhaps, in view of these advancements, ballet still remains the foundation of many professional dance-training programmes², with its values of discipline, focus and structure transferable to contemporary dance training as well as other dance forms.

1.3 Ballet's relevance in western contemporary society

Despite its rich history and tradition, ballet remains a living art form that continues to exercise a significant aesthetic influence in contemporary society. Works such as William Forsythe's *Kammer/Kammer* or Christopher Wheeldon's *After the Rain*, can still powerfully express ballet to diverse audiences around the world, representing one of the most popular theatre dance genres. Throughout the Western world, ballet companies are recognised as symbols of cultural achievement. Many companies, named after the country or city in which they are located, are sources of national or regional pride; they have an almost-emotional connection with many citizens. However, the cost of maintaining a professional ballet company is considerable and performance revenue covers only a small part of the many expenses. Therefore, ballet companies are typically aided by external financial support. Traditionally in Europe most of this support comes from a single source: state subsidies. These are usually allocated by a national body – e.g. The Arts Council or Ministry of Culture. It is not uncommon for established ballet companies to receive the same level of support and recognition as principal symphony orchestras³. In contrast, in North America private donations are the main source of external funding. Companies there have been able to tap into deep sources of support: endowment

² For the sake of completeness, it has also to be recognised that part of contemporary dance practice does not reference ballet at all. However, these aspects are not discussed as they extend beyond the parameters of this chapter.

³ Major European ballet companies have a broad spectrum of operational budgets, ranging from approx. €5 million to €15 million per annum.

funds, trusts, foundations and private business to ensure their survival (for example, Houston Ballet's endowment stood at \$53.7 million or €41.3m equivalent in 2012).

1.4 Irish ballet in brief

Ballet has been part of this country's cultural landscape since the first commercial theatre was built in Dublin around 1636. Generally, ballet was included in the main *entracte* pieces, but as it developed into a more independent art form, Dublin-based dancers followed European trends and produced small ballets. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries both Dublin-based and visiting dancers continued to perform on the Dublin stage, including the two great Italian ballerinas of the Romantic era: Carlotta Grisi and Marie Taglioni. In the early 20th century, ballet in Ireland was usually seen as part of the visiting opera and variety productions touring from the United Kingdom, although pure dance productions (such as those produced by Anna Pavlova and her company) were also presented.

In 1927, a significant development took place when William Butler Yeats invited Ninette de Valois to help him establish the Abbey Theatre School of Ballet at the National Theatre. This school has immense importance in the history of Irish ballet and much of Ireland's subsequent ballet history has stemmed from it. In 1943, Joan Denise Moriarty also founded an influential ballet school in Cork. Ms Moriarty became predominant in Ireland's ballet *milieu* for over 40 years through the various companies she founded and led: Cork Ballet Company (1947–1993), Irish Theatre Company (1959–1964), Irish Ballet Company/Irish National Ballet Company (1973–1989). Another company, Dublin City Ballet, which was founded by Louis O'Sullivan and operated from 1979 until 1985, also had an impact on Ireland's dance landscape through its diverse repertoire of classical and modern works.

Since the closure of the Irish National Ballet Company in 1989, the position of Irish ballet has been somewhat uncertain. Yet, the last 20 years have also witnessed the emergence of four new companies: Cork City Ballet (1991), Ballet Ireland (1998), Chrysalis Dance (2003) and Monica Loughman Ballet (2011). In addition, there has also been the formation of the National Youth Ballet Company (1995), the publication of the Arts Council's *Towards a Strategy of Support for Professional Ballet in Ireland* (2007), the launch of Youth Ballet West (2007) and the emergence of a national development agency for ballet: the Irish Ballet Forum (2009). These developments have contributed to keeping the art form active in Ireland's cultural consciousness.

The Arts Council has traditionally been the main source of funding for ballet companies in Ireland. Significantly, from 1953 until 1977 ballet was the only dance genre funded by the Arts Council. Until the mid-1980s, the Council's support for dance focused largely on the work of Joan Denise Moriarty. Following recommendations in Peter Brinson's report *The Dancer and the Dance: Developing Theatre Dance in Ireland*, which was commissioned by the Arts Council and published in 1985, the primary focus of policy-making and funding for dance became more favourable to contemporary dance. Moreover, and to a large extent because of the constraints of the current economic climate, available government funding has fallen considerably since 2008. Reflecting cuts to its overall budget and across art forms, between 2008 and 2013, the amount of Arts Council funding available to support dance has been reduced by over 41%. Collectively these changes have impacted on the support available for Irish ballet and have, de facto, impeded its advancement.

Despite these difficulties, ballet in Ireland is still popular, both in terms of attracting audiences and participation in classes. In addition to performances by Irish ballet companies, international touring companies such as the Birmingham Royal Ballet and Perm State Ballet are regular visitors. The fact that these companies keep returning confirms that there is an opportunity and market for Irish audiences to see both new and classical works performed by internationally renowned companies accompanied by live orchestras.

Although there has been a decline in participation recently, ballet classes remain popular with girls aged between four and sixteen. However, it is worth mentioning that all of the ballet schools in Ireland are private, unlike in many European countries where there are also public ballet schools. Interestingly, more classes are now available for adults returning to ballet after an absence of some years, or even for the first time. These classes offer both health and well-being benefits but they are also a form of creative expression; an important asset to the lives of Irish citizens of all ages.

1.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter we have reviewed the history of ballet; its origins and developments up to the present day. We have also considered the continuing relevance of the art form to contemporary society and culture. In an Irish context, we have looked at the primary milestones of ballet's development in this country as well as the main companies and actors up to the present day. In summary, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that the history of ballet reflects a long and rich tradition. Ballet remains popular with audiences in Ireland and internationally; it also continues to influence other dance *genres* and art forms. As a local reflection of a global phenomenon, ballet has been performed in Ireland for over 370 years. It should continue to play a significant role in Ireland's cultural landscape and indeed as part of our ongoing cultural and aesthetic development at individual, group, community and collective levels.

CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION

2.1 Chapter introduction

The lack of indigenous formal training remains one of the most serious impediments to the development of dance in Ireland. This shortcoming has had a particularly negative effect on the development of ballet, due to the highly technical requirements of ballet practice. It is also penalising the development of contemporary dance practice. As recent research has shown, approximately 50 Irish students leave the country every year to attend professional dance courses abroad (usually in the UK)⁴. This annual exodus of dancers results in the cumulative diminishing of potential performing and choreographic talent that would otherwise contribute greatly to the infrastructure of the Irish dance landscape. This chapter will discuss the pressing issue of how to develop formal indigenous dance training and will propose a possible educational model that may be suitable for Ireland.

This discussion builds on a number of important Arts Council reports on professional dance education in Ireland conducted over the past three decades. The most notable are Peter Brinson's, *The Dancer and the Dance* (1985); Leatherdale and Todd's, *Shall We Dance?* (1998); Yannick Marzin's, *A Professional Dance Curriculum for Ireland* (2003); and Victoria O'Brien's, *Step Up: a programme for pre-professional contemporary dance in Ireland* (2010). As Mary Cloake highlighted in her foreword to Marzin's report, a common thread running through these documents is the call for the Irish Government to support the provision of professional dance education. Acknowledging the crucial need for such support, this chapter will investigate a model that places formal dance training within the higher education system.

2.2 Impediments to the development of formal dance education in Ireland

When comparisons are drawn with other European countries, in Ireland dance has historically been a chronically under-resourced art form. Indeed dance was not named as an art form in the Irish government's Arts Acts until 2003⁵, and the Arts Council annual report in 1995 acknowledged that 'dance as an art form has suffered severe neglect in Ireland'⁶. Within this context, it is not surprising that formal dance education also remains seriously underdeveloped. At the level of primary and secondary education it is an optional strand within the physical education curriculum, rather than being placed within the arts education curriculum as a discrete subject of study (such as drama and music). This has contributed to a perception that dance education is an extra-curricular activity that belongs in the private sector outside of formal education. Pointing to the misconceptions about arts education in Ireland highlighted as early as 1979 in the Benson Report⁷, Peter Brinson suggests there is a "prejudice against dance" to be found in the Irish education system, which stems from stereotypical ideas about dance not being a "useful" subject of study, particularly for male students⁸. It can be argued that both the lack of appreciation of the art form as a viable professional career and the misplacement of dance education within the education system at both primary and secondary levels, has contributed to the lack of formally accredited professional dance education in Ireland.

In 1999, the former Minister for Arts, Síle de Valera, and the former Minister for Education, Micheál Martin, commissioned a proposal report from Dr Peter Renshaw for an Irish Academy for the Performing Arts (IAPA). The IAPA was conceived as a national academy that would 'promote and

⁴ See Victoria O'Brien, *Step Up: a programme for pre-professional contemporary dance in Ireland*, The Arts Council, 2010.

⁵ The previous definition of "the arts" in the Arts Acts of 1951 and 1973 included 'painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the drama, literature, design in industry and the fine arts and applied arts generally'.

⁶ The Arts Council, *Annual Report 1995*, p.61.

⁷ Ciarán Benson, *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education*, The Arts Council, 1979.

⁸ Peter Brinson, *The Dancer and the Dance: developing theatre dance in Ireland*, p.54.

develop the highest levels of professional education and training in music, drama and dance⁹. This report proposed the establishment of an undergraduate degree programme in contemporary dance (at the Firkin Crane Centre in Cork), but made no proposal for ballet training. Renshaw acknowledged that ‘one significant gap in the area of arts provision in Ireland is in the area of classical ballet’ and proposed that further research needed to be conducted into the feasibility of ‘creating a classical ballet culture at first, second and third levels’¹⁰. As Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 of this review show - and as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter - there is already an established ballet culture in the form of private extra-curricular ballet classes and private and state-funded pre-vocational dance courses. Although dance is not yet integrated within primary and secondary level school studies as a discrete subject, there is nevertheless a significant existing cohort of dance students in need of third-level formal education in both ballet and contemporary dance. The deficiencies within the dance education infrastructure as a whole certainly need to be addressed but this should not preclude the discussion of a model of formal professional dance education that embraces both ballet and contemporary dance disciplines.

2.3 A brief overview of the current provision for pre-vocational dance training in Ireland

O’Brien’s report indicates that as a pre-requisite to a career in ballet or contemporary performance, dance students in Ireland currently leave the country to pursue formal dance education abroad. While some European contemporary dance schools accept students from 18 years of age, the professional-level, full-time study of ballet must start earlier (usually at 16 years at the latest for female students) to facilitate the correct development of body plasticity and the mastery of technique needed for professional practice. To achieve the necessary entry level of technique required by overseas vocational courses at their entrance auditions, there are currently two main training paths available in Ireland: Part or full-time training at private dance schools and full-time training at VECs. Dance students can also gain valuable performance experience in youth dance companies. As O’Brien points out, students attending the full-time dance courses will normally go abroad to complete their dance education by way of vocational courses. Therefore the courses available in Ireland can be viewed as pre-vocational. The length of these courses varies from 1-3 years, and the age of students usually ranges from 17-21. Examples of full-time dance courses currently in operation in Ireland are (listed in order of establishment date):

- College of Dance, Monkstown, Co. Dublin (director: Joanna Banks)
- Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa, Cork (director: Alan Foley)
- Sallynoggin College of Further Education, Dublin (director: Lucy Dundon)
- Inchicore College of Further Education, Dublin (director: Marion Lennon)
- Bray Institute of Further Education, Co. Wicklow (course coordinator: Annette Hynes)
- Dublin International Conservatoire for Dance (director: Monica Loughman)

Several of these pre-vocational courses have played an important formative role in the training of some key dance artists working in Ireland today. These individuals progressed from these courses to vocational training abroad, and then to professional careers in dance¹¹. Another route taken, particularly by those pursuing a career in ballet, is to audition for vocational courses directly from private ballet schools at the age of 15-16 (usually after achieving high qualification marks in the Royal Academy of Dance vocational exams). However, regardless of the route a dance student takes, there is still a missing link between training in private schools and at pre-vocational courses in Ireland to obtaining work as a ballet or contemporary dancer in a professional company. The Arts Council’s

⁹ Peter Renshaw, *Proposal for an Irish Academy for the Performing Arts*, p.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.12.

¹¹ See O’Brien, pp.13-16.

ongoing engagement with both the dance sector and the public over many years has consistently demonstrated a strong sentiment that it should be possible for dance students to complete formal training at the highest level without having to leave the country.

2.4 A possible model for professional dance education in Ireland

When consulted during the preparation of this report, leading dance educationalists working in Ireland expressed the belief students should receive formal accreditation within the Irish education system for their dance studies (see Appendix 1, 2.2). Since Marzin's proposal for a professional dance curriculum in 2003, there has been a seismic shift in vocational dance training in Europe towards the formal accreditation of professional dance education courses and their integration within, or affiliation with, university degree programmes. There are a growing number of vocational dance schools that have transformed their ballet and contemporary dance programmes into formally accredited Bachelor of Arts (BA) courses. Examples of leading, internationally recognised schools that have adopted this model are listed below. The entry age for these courses (except where noted) is 16 years:

Austria

- Konservatorium Wien, Dance Department: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet and Contemporary)

Germany

- Staatliche Ballettschule Berlin: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet)
- Palucca Hochschule für Tanz Dresden: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet and Contemporary)
- Folkwang Universität der Künste: BA in Dance (Contemporary)
- Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet and Contemporary)
- Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, Ballett Akademie: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet supported by Contemporary)

Netherlands

- Theatre School Amsterdam, Dance Department, National Ballet Academy: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet)
- Koninklijk Conservatorium (Royal Conservatory): BA in Dance (Classical Ballet)
- Rotterdamse Dansacademie: BA in Dance (Contemporary)

Norway

- Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Academy of Dance: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet) (accepts students from 15 years of age)

Spain

- Real Conservatorio Profesional de Danza de Madrid: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet or Contemporary or Spanish Dance)

UK

- Central School of Ballet London: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet supported by Contemporary)
- London Contemporary Dance School at The Place: BA in Dance (Contemporary) (normally only accepts students from 18 years of age)
- Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance: BA in Dance (Classical Ballet and Contemporary)
- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland: BA in Modern Ballet (Classical Ballet supported by Contemporary)

Training on a formally accredited programme has enormous benefits for dance students and would be particularly interesting in an Irish context, as it would provide students with a direct route to further undergraduate or postgraduate study if required. Leatherdale and Todd's survey of Irish dance students highlighted the fact that there is significant pressure placed on students to achieve a secure level of educational attainment (i.e. the Leaving Certificate) in advance of pursuing full-time dance education¹². In the absence of formal accreditation for dance training in Ireland, dance students take this route to safeguard future job prospects if they need to abandon their dance career, or refocus their professional prospects. However, this has led to many dancers in Ireland only starting full-time dance education at 18, which is too late to begin professional ballet training.

At this point it is important to note there are two undergraduate programmes with a dance component operating in universities in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The University of Limerick offers a BA (Hons) in Voice and Dance that includes some modules on dance technique for those choosing to specialise in dance rather than voice. This programme focuses on contemporary dance and students take three practice-based modules and two theory-based modules per semester. The University of Ulster offers a BA (Hons) in Dance that also focuses on contemporary dance, with half of the contact hours dedicated to practice (workshops and dance technique classes) and the other half to theory-based modules. The emergence of these programmes over the last decade is a very positive development for students of dance in Ireland. Both programmes offer a range of modules that provide their graduates with a useful skill set applicable to a variety of jobs within the dance sector. However, these programmes are much broader in scope than the intense training techniques required to pursue a career in professional ballet performance. The minimum number of contact hours for technique/repertoire classes for professional dance training is about 30 hours per semester week.

Other differences between the BA courses with a dance component currently on offer in Ireland and the European programmes listed above are the matriculation requirements for entrants and the age of entry. In BA programmes in the UK and mainland Europe, students are enrolled at the age of 16 in line with the optimum cut-off point age-wise to enter full-time training for a career in professional dance. In terms of matriculation, admission of dance students to third-level education can be compared with matriculation provisions made for applicants, such as mature students, who do not hold a school-leaving certificate (for example the Leaving Certificate in Ireland, the A-Levels in England and Wales, or the *Abitur* in Germany). In the case of mature students, pertinent life experience and aptitude for a particular course is taken into consideration. Similarly, the highly developed kinaesthetic knowledge of gifted dance students is acknowledged as being sufficient to satisfy matriculation requirements in the countries that offer undergraduate studies in dance from 16 years of age. Looking to Ireland, there is already a precedent of admitting mature students who fall outside the usual matriculation requirements, and dance students should be placed in a similar category.

2.5 Proposed outline of course content for a BA in Dance

The past few decades have seen a marked increase in the need for dancers to be accomplished in both classical and contemporary dance techniques so they can be competitive in auditions. Writing in 2003, Marzin points out that in Europe there has been an 'evolution of choreographic creation [...] where contemporary dance now employs dancers with excellent technical skills, as well as strong performing personalities; and where the repertoire of ballet companies includes more and more contemporary dance'¹³. This trend appears to have continued and indeed strengthened over the past decade and can also be observed in the Irish dance landscape. Considering the employment opportunities for professional dancers in Ireland, where (similar to the theatre profession) work is currently only available on a seasonal or production-by-production basis, it would be essential to provide an equally strong foundation in both classical ballet and contemporary dance. Marzin's

¹² Leatherdale and Todd, *Shall we Dance? A Report on Vocational Dance Training in Ireland*, p.34.

¹³ Marzin, *A professional dance curriculum for Ireland*, p.6.

proposed curriculum is focused on contemporary dance, with ballet included as a supporting technique. However, a more equally weighted interdisciplinary curriculum would train dancers to have the capacity to easily adapt to different choreographic styles, both for jobs in Ireland and overseas. This is not a new idea; several BA in Dance programmes in Europe are providing this interdisciplinary training (e.g. see the relevant courses in Austria, Germany and the UK in the table above). A further important component for an Irish BA in Dance would be the inclusion of a module in choreography/composition. This would provide early opportunities to nurture future choreographic talent. In addition to technique and repertoire classes, students would also pursue various academic courses (e.g. dance history, dance theory), and supporting studies (e.g. kinesiology, professional development) and would undertake a BA dissertation project in their final year (this could be based on a practical project). The practice to theory ratio would be in the region of 85-90% practice to 15-10% theory, depending on the year of study.

In structuring course modules on a BA programme, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS) would be taken into consideration. The ECTS is the recommended system of academic accreditation across Europe and has been adopted by Irish universities. It is designed to enable formal recognition for studies transferable across institutions. Within this system, one credit is equivalent to 25-30 hours of student input (including class contact hours and assessments), and a three-year Bachelor's degree is equivalent to a minimum of 180 ECTS. Following the ECTS requirements, an indicative example of a year's study within a Bachelor of Dance curriculum is shown in the following table:

Subject Strands	Module Components	Semester 1	Semester 2	ECTS per year
1. Dance technique and performance practice	Ballet	10	10	40
	Contemporary	10	10	
2: Creative Practice	Choreography	2	3	5
3: Contextual Studies	Dance Studies	1	1	5
	Music Studies	1		
	Theatre Studies		1	
4: Professional Skills	Kinesiology	1	1	5
	Body Conditioning	1	1	
	Personal Development Programme	0.5	0.5	
5: Optional Modules	Workshops			5
	Projects			
	Dissertation (3 rd year)			
Total ECTS credits				60

Indicative Module Content

Ballet:
Weekly technique classes would include daily class (x5), Pointe work and Repertoire (x3) (female students), Coaching and Repertoire (x3) (male students) and Pas de Deux (x2).
Contemporary:
Daily technique classes (x5) would include an introduction to various contemporary and modern dance techniques (these might include Graham, Cunningham, Limon and release-based practice). These technique classes would be complemented by contemporary repertoire and partnering classes (x5).
Performance Practice:
Students would rehearse for school performances led by in-house staff or guest choreographers.
Choreography:
Students would study composition and would have the opportunity to choreograph project works to be performed by their class.
Contextual Studies:

A range of courses such as dance history, dance theory and performing methodologies would provide an enriching, interdisciplinary context for the technique-based classes.

Professional Skills:

Kinesiology classes would introduce various approaches to the study of human movement that are applicable to dance (e.g. anatomy, biomechanics, injury management and prevention).

Body conditioning would include classes or individual sessions in conditioning practices such as Pilates, Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais.

A Personal Development Programme would include sessions on career development such as audition preparation, the writing of funding applications and project management.

Optional Modules:

Students would have the opportunity to study optional modules in subjects related to their studies and would participate in workshops with guest practitioners. In their final year, students would conduct an independent study project combining practical and theoretical knowledge.

2.6 The positioning of a professional dance programme within a university setting and the development of international associations for quality assurance

Although generally very favourable about the inclusion of a professional dance curriculum within a formal higher education context, Marzin suggested concern may arise over a possible lack of autonomy regarding course structure and content and a possible distancing from the professional dance world¹⁴. There is, however, an existing model in actor training currently in operation in Ireland that demonstrates such a concern need not be an issue. The Lir, Ireland's National Academy of Dramatic Art at Trinity College Dublin, was established in 2011 and the BA in Acting from that institution provides a potential template for the development of a BA in Dance in terms of how it is integrated into the higher education system. The Lir students are Trinity College students but the academy operates autonomously with regards to the development, structuring and operation of its programmes. It also has a purpose-built building situated off-campus. In addition to maintaining strong links with the professional theatre community, The Lir has a formal association with the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. The curriculum for the acting degree (and other degrees offered by The Lir) were developed in association with RADA to ensure the course meets best practice and operates to the highest international standards.

As Brinson (1985), Leatherdale and Todd (1998) and Marzin (2003) have argued, in the absence of a tradition of indigenous formal training in Ireland it is vital professional standards are measured against international standards. As there is currently no dedicated quality assurance body for dance in Ireland, it will be important to liaise with external (overseas) partners to ensure the highest international standards are upheld. In November 2012, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established at the behest of the Irish government's Education and Training Act (2012). This new body amalgamated four quality assurance bodies: the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). Liaison with QQI will be essential in developing a quality control strategy for formal dance training in Ireland. However, in the absence of a dedicated quality assurance body for dance, an association with a world-leading dance school, based on the template established by The Lir, would greatly assist graduates of a professional dance course to compete for jobs in the international market. It would be highly beneficial to a BA in Dance in Ireland, in whichever university it is based, to avail of an association with an internationally recognised partner organisation or accreditation body. An example of a potential associate might be the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) in the UK. This organisation was founded in 2001 as a designated higher education institution for professional dance and drama training. Its affiliate schools include the Central School of Ballet, the London

¹⁴ Marzin, p.9.

Contemporary Dance School, Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (it also includes drama schools such as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA)).

2.7 Chapter conclusion

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, dance education in Ireland has traditionally been neglected within the formal education infrastructure at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Consultation with dance educators in Ireland for this report demonstrated a strong desire to redress the positioning of dance as an optional strand within the physical education curriculum at primary and secondary levels (see Appendix 1, 2.5). It was felt this positioning affects the perception of dance as an art form worthy of the highest level of professional and academic study and such a negative perceptions inevitably have repercussions throughout the entire dance sector. Dance should be placed within the arts education curriculum as a discrete subject of study, as is the case with drama and music. Concrete steps towards this repositioning should be taken as a matter of priority.

Currently, dance students in Ireland who aspire to pursue careers as professional ballet or contemporary dancers have to leave the country to train to the standard required. Since the discontinuation of Arts Council bursaries for overseas vocational training, these dancers have been unsupported. This is a situation that must be addressed urgently. On the subject of the development of dance education to the appropriate professional level in Ireland, it is important graduates of vocational programmes receive formal accreditation for their studies. The movement towards the adoption of BA degree programmes by leading vocational dance schools in the UK and across Europe has addressed the need for formal accreditation of vocational dance study, allowing dance students to progress to further education if required. This path would also be highly beneficial for students of dance in Ireland. Consultation with dance educationalists for this report showed strong support for this model (see Appendix 1, 2.2). If a BA in Dance at a National Academy of Dance were to be established to address the needs of students who wished to train at the highest international standards in Ireland, the partnering of such an institution with a university would be essential. Similarly, liaison with a world-class external partner institution would be vital for quality assurance and the establishment, maintenance and assessment of international standards.

CHAPTER 3: AN AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter discusses the ways Irish audiences engage with ballet, either through attending performances or participation in classes/workshops etc. It attempts to gauge current levels of engagement and reflects on possible strategies and actions that might increase these levels.

Engagement, be it with audiences or active participants, is the *raison d'être* for artists and companies. It follows that a commitment to developing both of these strands is integral to the advancement of ballet in Ireland. An awareness and understanding of the issues hindering levels of engagement, together with the implementation of strategies to address these issues, is essential for the art form to flourish.

3.2 Audience data sources

The collection and analysis of reliable data is one of the key elements for implementing effective audience development strategies. In Ireland a widespread network of public venues provides a certain amount of information with regard to audience data, particularly the number of tickets sold. Beyond this, the amount and nature of data available is extremely limited. The lack of an effective system to capture reliable data results in an incomplete picture. This, in turn, makes it difficult to establish an accurate benchmark against which any changes or progress can be measured. At the time of this review, the principle data sources are the Arts Audiences' documents: Arts Attendances in Ireland 2012 and 2013. These documents draw upon data contained within the annual Target Group Index (TGI) research/survey¹⁵. While some information about ballet is present, its scope of analysis specific to indigenous practice is limited. For instance, the TGI survey does not distinguish between attendances in Ireland or abroad, therefore an unknown proportion of data will be garnered from performances that took place outside of Ireland. Also the TGI survey does not differentiate between professional and amateur performances. Nevertheless, the document does provide data from which some useful observations can be made. For example, a comment in the 2012 report states that 'statistics about regional attendance have to be read in the knowledge that provision of art forms varies across regions too; e.g. attendance at ballet in Connaught /Ulster will depend on how much ballet is on offer in that region as well as other factors'. One possible reason for this is that annual fluctuations in attendance are most likely attributable to supply i.e. the number of ballet performances taking place, rather than the demand. Looking at data held by the Arts Council, 2011/12 appears to be atypical because fewer Arts Council supported performances were given during that period than usual, due to financial pressures. The 2013 report indicates an increase in attendances, undoubtedly due to more ballet performances taking place than in the previous year.

The TGI survey does not include participatory activity. In order to gather this information approaches were made to various teaching societies and examination boards nationwide. However, without the existence of a pre-existing culture of data sharing, research attempts were met with a reluctance to share information about their activities by some practitioners/teachers/organisations. This has led to significant gaps in data and represents an obstacle to compiling reliable estimates of the number of participants in ballet activities such as classes and workshops.

Information from other sources has proven difficult to obtain e.g. some venues and visiting overseas companies are also reluctant to share information because of commercial sensitivities. The information retained by the Arts Council relates only to their funded clients. Therefore, given the

¹⁵ It should be noted that the 'key finding' (Page 5 of the 2012 report) that states "attendance at ballet is up slightly in 2012 on the previous year" is an error. Attendances decreased slightly in 2012 compared with the 2011 figures (see Page 8 of the report).

limited information available from venues, visiting companies and the Arts Council, it is not possible to more accurately substantiate the attendance levels at performances as indicated by the TGI data.

3.3 Audience data observations

Although the overall picture of audience engagement is somewhat incomplete, there are several observations and trends we can extrapolate from the Arts Attendances in Ireland 2012 report. These observations can be divided into four main elements and were supported by comments made by some of those practitioners who participated in the Arts Council's consultation meeting that took place in September 2013 (see appendix 1):

- *The audience for ballet is not growing.* Audiences fell in 2012 from 2011 and only recovered to levels slightly above 2011 in 2013. In general, it would appear people are attending less frequently each year. As mentioned previously this may be partially due to the availability and frequency of performances and tours by Irish and visiting companies.
- *The ballet audience profile/demographic is not diverse.* The audience for ballet in Ireland is predominantly female (2012 = 71%; 2013 = 78%). In 2012 50% of the audience was drawn from the ABC1 social stratification, increasing to 60% in 2013. On average 40% of the audience for ballet is over 55 years of age. Any fluctuations in this pattern over recent years have been relatively small.
- *The geographical variations for ballet audience across Ireland follow the trends of all art forms.* With a lower dependency on Dublin audiences than classical music, contemporary dance or opera, it appears ballet's audiences are relatively well spread across the country with similar proportions of the population attending ballet as attending other art forms.
- *There is capacity for growth.* Against a background of financial austerity and a highly competitive recreational market, companies will have to commit to strategies to both maintain current levels of attendance and to developing new audiences. While the potential to increase ticket sales might vary between companies, venues and programmes, the opportunity to reach larger market shares represents an opportunity for the sector as a whole.

3.4 Participation observations

As mentioned previously, it has not been possible to accurately identify participatory levels. However, from the information gathered both during the aforementioned consultation process and through informal direct enquiries to ballet accreditation bodies, it is possible to draw a few conclusions:

- *Ballet as a recreational activity for children has declined.* Ballet schools, notably in Dublin and its commuter towns, report a decline in student numbers, particularly among the younger age group. To some degree this may be attributable to fluctuations in the birth rate and migration, but the financial pressures faced by families appear to have had an impact. Often parents who are able to send their children to classes are reluctant to take on the additional costs of examinations and performances. Over the last five years there has been a decline of over 20% in the number of entries to the Royal Academy of Dance's examinations in Ireland. Similar levels of decline are reported by the International Dance Teacher Association. These issues are not unique to Ireland. Similar declines in numbers of students and levels of engagement are reported in most other European countries.
- *Engagement at vocational level has remained constant.* Although there has been a decline in levels of engagement among younger age groups, this has not followed through to the older

cohort at higher/vocational levels. Given that fewer young children are beginning training it remains to be seen if the current trend at the higher levels is sustained.

- *Practitioners' commitment remains strong.* Undoubtedly ballet schools are experiencing hardship - with rising costs and falling levels of income but this has led to greater co-operation among schools and there is no sign of a decline in teachers' commitment. Indeed, they are attending more training courses, indicating a desire to update and develop their skills and knowledge.

3.5 Strategies for nurturing and developing audiences

Within the context outlined above a set of strategies should be adopted:

3.5.1 *Research*

The existence of quantitative and comparative data is essential not only to devising effective strategies but also to ascertaining their effectiveness following their adoption. Ballet organisations need to set a number of benchmarks against which progress can be monitored. Previously in this chapter, reference has been made to the difficulties in gathering accurate, comprehensive information, specific to the art form, particularly in relation to the actual total attendance figures at ballet performances and the proportion of seats sold against capacity.

For this reason, it would be beneficial for enterprising companies to undertake their own research to find out more about the profile and demographics of their audiences. Based on existing data in relation to the gender, class and age of people attending ballet shows (see point 3.2.1), it is reasonable to assume broader audience diversification could lead to an incremental increase in the number of people attending live performances nationally. However, it is only by conducting ongoing research that it will become clear whether audiences are becoming more diverse. This requires a robust methodology and strategic approach.

3.5.2 *Skills*

Skilful and knowledgeable practitioners are needed to structure and analyse research processes as well as devise and implement successful strategies. In ballet, as in most art forms, there is an over-reliance on venues and presenters/promoters to provide the personnel to deliver a comprehensive communications strategy covering marketing, press and public relations. However this does not absolve companies of their responsibilities; the requirement on them to articulate their aims and objectives and how they intend doing so as part of an overall strategy. Companies must invest sufficient resources to ensure that they have the necessary skills and capacities to implement their chosen strategies and actively engage in audience development.

3.5.3 *Partnerships*

The point above related to skills and highlights the benefit of working in partnership. As is the case with many art forms, there will be mutual benefits for venues and companies if strategies are articulated and understood and campaigns devised in partnership. An integrated approach allows for everyone to play to everyone others' strengths i.e. the venues' knowledge of its audience and the companies' knowledge of the work to be performed. Partnership can take various forms, be it with media organisations, across art forms, and/or with agencies and specialists. In each case the principles of trust and mutual understanding of expectations should be honoured. It is difficult for an arts organisation to have all the necessary in-house skills and knowledge to implement a comprehensive communications strategy. Therefore working in partnership could be a potential way of helping to fill

this skills gaps, stimulate creativity and achieve higher-quality outcomes than would have been possible by working alone.

3.5.4 *Branding*

Successful branding is clear, consistent and differentiates a company within an often crowded and competitive marketplace. Decisions regarding design, photography, copywriting and various media formats are the key elements and these in turn inform a company's print, advertising, use of digital technology, social media, etc. The quality of visual presentation is also essential in building a strong brand image. Dance as an art form inherently provides strong photographic images but sadly these often constitute a missed opportunity because lack of investment results in second-rate photographs.

The importance of strong branding should not be underestimated; particularly for companies with ambitions to develop the art form, which inevitably means a degree of risk taking. If, through effective branding, it has been possible to build audience trust and loyalty, a company reduces the likelihood of numbers falling off when they do take artistic risks. Strong branding can also build momentum for a company beyond its marketing function and be an influencing factor socially and politically. Potential sponsors and donors will also be influenced by positive branding that promotes confidence and gives a feel for a company's personality and ambition.

3.5.5 *Programming*

It is likely the audience profile for ballet in Ireland has remained constant due to relatively conservative, traditional programming by venues and companies. Most visiting companies bring traditional full-length classics to Ireland and Irish companies tend to opt for familiar titles and works. This lack of breadth in programming inevitably reinforces the status quo and leads to a conservative attitude.

For companies to understand the potential effects of a more varied programme and to identify and target potential new audiences is challenging, stimulating and rewarding. Any shifts or changes in programme content should take place in the context of an overall communications strategy that incorporates research, skills development, organisational capacity, partnerships and branding. Greater co-ordination of the ballet 'offer' to venues should also be factored into this approach. Repertory clashes and repetitive programming only serve to undermine the aim to give audiences more choice and build a more diverse audience base. The presentation of high-quality, international companies performing works unseen in Ireland would also assist in this endeavour¹⁶.

A co-ordinated approach among Irish practitioners and venues could lead to a significant shift in audience attitudes and public perceptions. A greater awareness and appreciation of the true breadth and creativity of the art form would benefit the sector and Irish cultural life in general. . Although there will always be a place (and audience) for traditional full-length classics in venues' and companies' schedules, full recognition in programming of the vibrancy, range and relevance of ballet is essential if the art form is to develop and reach a new and diverse audience.

3.5.6 *External perceptions*

If there is sufficient desire, appetite, determination and a collective will within the ballet sector to reinvigorate itself in Ireland, this endeavour will need broader cultural, social and political support. The visibility of ballet and how it is publicly perceived is hugely influenced by broadcasters and media coverage. The way ballet is presented in the media is important and influential. The art form needs articulate advocates who are able to speak authoritatively on behalf of the sector. Individual

¹⁶ Irish audiences appear to be persuaded that 'Russian' companies are necessarily high quality but this is not always true. It would be a positive development if, over time, this misconception could be addressed by presenting a more varied range of international companies.

companies are more likely to flourish if the art form is more widely understood, valued and promoted. The ballet sector in Ireland is relatively small so it is important it speaks with a unified voice in the promotion of ballet as an art form. If the sector in Ireland can develop a co-ordinated approach to working together it is more likely to have the ability to withstand possible external (competitive) factors and negative perceptions. To achieve attitudinal change takes time, perseverance and a consistent and persuasive message.

3.5.7 Participatory activities

Historically, participatory activities have been targeted towards children and young people, but there has been a noted recent increase in interest among adults too. Ballet as an art form requires creativity, musicality, physical fitness, co-ordination, teamwork and commitment. Participation encourages physical and mental well-being and provides expressive and interpretative opportunities and challenges. These skills and attributes have value beyond the world of ballet and, as with many other art forms, participatory activity is known to have a positive impact on peoples' lives.

The majority of ballet classes and initial training of students takes place in private ballet schools. Although these activities fall outside the Arts Council's remit, there is no doubting the important contribution these schools make to the art form in Ireland. The provision of participatory opportunities is important to the development of ballet in Ireland whether through private ballet schools, educational establishments, or outreach projects delivered by professional performing companies.

Professional dancers can serve as role models; often inspiring and enthusing children and young people. To enhance this - and to increase awareness of the breadth of the art form - people should be encouraged to attend performances. This requires a combination of relevant approaches e.g. an attitudinal shift among teachers and parents towards a more comprehensive understanding of ballet; venues/companies to provide concessionary ticket pricing to enable greater access and more outreach work by companies based on a wider range of repertory and choreographic influences.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

While acknowledging the difficulty of interpreting the limited data currently available, there appears to be a similarity between the observations drawn from attendance figures and the decline in the number of those actively participating in ballet. In both areas of engagement, any decline is most likely due to external factors rather than a lack of interest or desire among potential audiences or participants. The fall in audience numbers in 2011/12 is most likely due to the fewer performances than in the previous year. This view supported by an increase in attendances in 2012/13 linked to more performances. In the case of participatory levels, the decline is most likely due to the broader financial pressures facing the country (and much of Europe).

With no perceived loss of appetite for engagement in ballet, the sector as a whole must work together to halt any decline. It must put strategies in place to nurture and develop attendances/engagement at performances and participatory activities. Failure to do so will jeopardise the art form and the opportunity of capitalising upon the potential to develop ballet in Ireland will be lost.

If perceptions of ballet are to change and wider engagement achieved, companies and venues must take a strategic approach to presenting a broader programme that encompasses the full range of the art form. This should be supported by audience research and systematic collection of data, investment in skills development, more collaborative partnerships and communications strategies that strengthen company branding, increase public awareness and create a higher profile for the art form as a whole.

CHAPTER 4: PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter considers what constitutes best professional practice in ballet and discusses how these observations might provide possible and suitable options for developing the art form in Ireland. Obviously there is no single definition of best practice but there are several factors common to certain companies: longevity, contribution to art form development and administrative, managerial and financial robustness. Together, such attributes make successful companies. Inevitably these companies experience peaks and troughs due to a wide range of factors both internal and external, but their success and longevity is achieved by their ability to ride out such storms.

Before assessing these common factors and attempting to define best practice in an international context, it should be emphasised these observations and conclusions are based on fully professional companies. However, in the case of individuals, the application of the word 'professional' may describe behaviour and attitudes rather than an ability to earn a living as a dancer. Within this report the term professional company refers to organisations in which the overwhelming majority of the company dancers are fully trained and being paid for their work. Some companies offer apprenticeship schemes/opportunities for students, but for the purposes of this section of the report, companies are defined as above.

4.2 Common Factors

Artistic integrity as demonstrated through performance schedules is the key common factor shared by successful companies.

This factor is so important it is assessed in greater depth later in this chapter (see section 4.3).

Other than the artistic aspects, successful companies world-wide also generally have:

- *A strong governing body and leadership*, which sets and maintains the company's vision, aims and values. This informs the artistic direction and the supporting structures required to deliver the artistic endeavours and to meet statutory legal and financial requirements. Governing bodies are responsible for the longevity of the company through succession planning for key positions within the organisation and by providing specialist advice and strategic guidance when necessary and appropriate.
- *A commitment to high quality presentation values and production standards* in their productions. This usually involves working with a range of talented set, costume and lighting designers with access to skilled technical and wardrobe teams.
- *A financially robust operating model* that includes a degree of certainty in levels of income and expenditure. Proportions of income from local, regional or national government, from box office, sponsorship, donations, philanthropic contributions or from commercial activities will vary depending on the type of company and the country of residence but they all have a capacity to forward plan on the basis of reliable income and expenditure projections. As part of this model, many companies also invest considerable resources towards fundraising to reduce the dependency (and risks) of state funding.
- *A comprehensive communications strategy* requires companies to make informed decisions on branding, pricing, customer service, social media, public engagement etc. Successful companies communicate effectively to ensure a strong public profile and invariably work

hard to achieve a level of support from political champions and advocates. Appropriate styles and methods of communication are developed in order to reach and motivate target audiences.

- *A range of partnerships* typically drawn from venues, promoters, orchestras, media organisations, other dance companies (shared productions are increasingly common) and sponsors. At a time when so many countries and companies are grappling with financial difficulties, partnerships provide an operational model that is mutually beneficial by reducing risk and financial exposure.
- *A home base with studios* to provide the physical resources needed to create and rehearse work.
- *An ability to manage change* to ensure longevity, continuity and survival. Successful companies are able to manage their own internally instigated changes and deal with external change. They can also grasp external opportunities. Change often brings fruitful outcomes and the capacity to embrace change and respond positively is an indication of maturity and strength.
- *A realistic attitude and expectation of what can be achieved*, both on and off stage, within the confines of resources and time. While ambition is essential, successful companies are able to take a realistic view of the resources required to achieve such ambition. They also demonstrate a realistic sense of the timeframe and the likelihood of success. They are then able to deploy the plans and strategies to work towards their ambitions with an awareness of the possible requirement to modify both their plans and ambitions as they progress. This inevitably raises the issue of compromise and the degree to which it is acceptable. Successful companies are generally able to make considered and wise judgments on these matters.

As expressed in the introduction to this section, companies inevitably experience peaks and troughs and it is unlikely any single company could demonstrate every attribute listed above at all times. There are numerous variables that influence the effectiveness of companies, but successful companies with high levels of artistic achievement tend to demonstrate many of these attributes. It is worth noting that these attributes and observations apply to companies irrespective of scale.

Education and community activities are not included in this list because the expectation and desire to undertake this work or indeed its value is not universally shared. Some countries expect companies to offer these types of activities in return for local, regional or national funding, but this is not always the case. The degree to which this work is integrated into the day-to-day work of a company also varies widely.

Some companies choose to undertake education and community work as part of their audience development strategies i.e. as an adjunct to marketing activities. This is an indication of the range of approaches and levels of engagement (see Chapter 3).

The list also omits to mention the link many companies have with a vocational training establishments. Many bigger companies have a formal association with a school but in virtually every case these are separately constituted organisations and do not fall directly under the remit of the companies. In most cases the schools are supported through educational structures and associated funding. There are companies with no formal (or even informal) link to a school, yet these are successful in recruiting excellent dancers and meet many of the attributes listed above. Companies and training establishments benefit mutually from being on each others' 'radar': training establishments need to place their graduates and companies want to recruit the best possible graduates, irrespective of where they are trained. Of course, a specific relationship with a school is a considerable asset, particularly when a company has specific style and repertory characteristics. However, in the case of graduates, soloists or principals, every company will endeavour to recruit the

highest calibre of dancer. It is a competitive market and dancers, given a choice, will invariably opt for a company that offers opportunities in the context of an interesting and challenging repertory – ideally with the chance to work with a respected choreographer on new work.

4.3 Artistic considerations and planning

Artistic integrity, especially when applied to planning and programming, raises complex issues resistant to formulaic definitions. However, there are several areas where a consistent approach is taken by successful ballet companies. These apparently over-arching principles are noteworthy:

- A commitment to creativity and to move the art form forward
- The production of a ‘balanced’ programme
- Imaginative programming that takes account of practical considerations

4.3.1 *A commitment to creativity and to move the art form forward*

Given the history of classical ballet and the importance full-length ‘classics’ have played in its development and popularity, it is not surprising most companies depend to some extent on the presentation of these traditional, well-known works. Very many companies around the world depend on an annual series of performances of *The Nutcracker* at Christmas to bolster their financial income. For many, these classics are the introduction to the art form and for many dancers these classic roles are the benchmark against which their artistry and technique is measured. The desire and necessity of preserving these valuable classics is unquestionable but ballet has very few of these works¹⁷ compared to other performing art forms e.g. music, drama and opera. With relatively few classics from which to choose, companies have to be careful not to over-schedule these classics to the point audiences become overly familiar and less inclined to attend. Also the likelihood of clashes with other companies that are also performing these classics, effectively saturating the market with similar repertory, should also be a consideration, especially when touring. However *The Nutcracker* does have a unique seasonal attraction that appears to justify regular, annual Christmas-time performances for many companies worldwide.

Successful companies use the classics wisely and strategically but also realise the dangers of over-reliance on a handful of works. Their sole wish is not to be curators of historical works and they understand the need to advance ballet through the commissioning of new works or the acquisition of works by leading choreographers. This not only refreshes and challenges dancers; it also stimulates collaborators and creative teams, presents opportunities to engage with new audiences and widens the perception of the art form amongst existing adherents. Making ballet more relevant to the 21st century – while still respecting the place of the classics and the art form’s traditions and history – is a formula for success replicated throughout the world.

Inevitably, the provision of a more diverse range of programming creates the potential for a more diverse audience base. It also provides more interesting and stimulating challenges for the dancers, which invariably improves standards and artistic capacity. For many dancers the opportunity to perform the classics, work in a variety of different choreographic styles and to create new work is the ideal mix. This encourages dancers’ loyalty and is found to develop interpretative ability and strengthen technical skills. As mentioned previously, all companies set out to recruit the best possible dancers at every level. New graduates need professional role models if they are to develop technically and artistically. Equally, and perhaps to an even greater extent, senior dancers also need opportunities to evolve and be challenged. A varied repertory is an important element in this regard. Dancers must

¹⁷ For instance, the famous Tchaikovsky classics: *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*; together with *Coppelia* and *Giselle*, and versions of *Romeo and Juliet* form the core works with the less familiar *La Bayadere* and *La Sylphide* featuring in some companies’ repertoires.

also work with high-quality teachers, répétiteurs, rehearsal directors and ballet staff, if they are to continue to develop. The balance between continuity and a degree of familiarity with the need to be questioned and challenged is an essential ingredient in the development of intelligent and curious artists.

There are some successful companies that have not adopted this approach – usually choreographer-led companies that mostly perform the choreographer/director's work. However, these are the exceptions and the longevity and stability of such companies is questionable. The cessation of Frankfurt's support of William Forsythe and the initial uncertainty regarding the future of Bejart Ballet Lausanne following Maurice Bejart's death are examples of this fragility.

4.3.2 *The production of a 'balanced' programme*

The question of balance in programming is linked directly to the performing pattern of the company. The aim is to present the full range of a company's programming strands over a period of time. For companies that only perform at a venue once a year (perhaps where other visiting companies will also perform) this balance may be achieved over a two or three year period (with the additional challenge of complementing the programmes of visiting companies). For companies making more frequent, regular visits to a venue, this balance may be achieved over a significantly shorter period, perhaps over a year. If a company can present two programmes in a single visit, the aim is to achieve that balance within the two programmes. It is inevitable these broad, basic principles are adapted and compromised on occasions e.g. to suit a festival's programme that may be based on a particular theme or anniversary or to avoid clashes with other companies. However any changes take place against the background of the company's programming policy and guiding principles. This allows the desired balance to endure over time without undue compromise.

Balancing a programme requires many other factors to be taken into consideration. For example, when devising a mixed programme (i.e. two or more shorter works) the following questions could be material:

- Will the music, design and choreography of each work contrast, complement or clash with the other works in the programme?
- Will the programme feature most/all of the dancers or will the same few dancers feature in most/all of the works?
- Are there sufficient opportunities and roles to develop young, less experienced dancers?
- Can the technical team meet the demands of several works in the same programme?
- Is the order the works are presented showing each work to their best advantage?
- From the audience perspective, is there a good balance between challenging and entertaining work?
- Who is the target audience?

Programming commissioned work, whether full-length or shorter, brings specific challenges. In most cases companies have to market the work long before it exists. A title and outline description of the work is often required long before a single step has been choreographed. The need to have researched the creative team thoroughly and have a mechanism for monitoring progress during the creation is paramount. Successful companies usually make well-informed choices and tend to tackle and resolve any problems as they arise during the creative process. This may require difficult decisions but commissioning new work cannot be risk-free. Advancing the art form is only achieved by taking risks – successful companies take those risks, manage them well and take mitigating action if required.

Many companies, in addition to programming full-length classics and commissioning new works, augment their repertory through the acquisition of existing works by established choreographers. For example, works by Balanchine, Kylian, MacMillan, Ashton, Cranko, Forsythe, Robbins and some other choreographers are performed by numerous companies around the world. This globalisation of repertory has its critics who lament the possible compromises to a company's individuality and

distinctiveness. However, companies acquire such works because of their quality: they provide excellent challenges for dancers and are often popular with audiences. Also by including established works in a repertory, the potential risks of commissioning new works are, to a degree, mitigated within the context of the overall programming.

There is no set formula for achieving a balanced programme but a range of factors need to be considered. Finding the balance requires thoughtful planning, artistic integrity and instinct, and an awareness of the broader global developments within the art form.

4.3.3 Imaginative programming achieved that takes account of practical considerations

The previous sections have stressed the importance of creativity and a balanced programme but for these principles to be honoured the delivery has to be rooted in the reality of the situation and circumstances within which a company operates.

For example, there may be very good artistic, financial and programming reasons for a company's desire to stage a production of *The Sleeping Beauty* but if the production is to tour small venues and the dancers are inexperienced the likelihood of success is remote. Scaling down classics to stages that are clearly too small, with dancers incapable of meeting the demands of the roles, represents an unacceptable degree of compromise.

Artistic decisions and ambitions need to relate to the skills and resources available and be appropriate in scale to the venues involved. Successful, established companies do not jeopardise their reputations by unduly compromising standards of performance, either artistically or in terms of presentation. They are able to preserve the quality of performance by making informed judgments in the context of good planning and an awareness of available resources.

That awareness extends to the financing of the company, which requires that the impact of artistic and programming decisions is rationally understood. In this sense, while the risks associated with presenting a new work should be factored into financial planning, they should always be mitigated through other, more predictable financial resources based on past experience or established relationships (e.g. levels of sponsorship or funding).

In addition to the balance in programming, the success of the three-strand approach (full-length classics, new works and established works) also depends on the acceptance and understanding of this approach by audiences. This may require some degree of subtlety and may only be achieved over time. However both the quality of performances and the balance in programming provide the foundations for a company to develop its audience. Over time an audience will trust a company (and its programme) but this also requires venue managers to understand and support this approach. For this reason, successful companies invest significant effort into developing relationships and partnerships with venues.

Touring is a way of life for many companies and often sets their operating parameters. Transportation and accommodation costs, rehearsal space, the varying technical demands, the level of practical support offered by venues, other programming at the venue pre-and-post visit, local socio-political issues, continuity and expertise of venue staff are just some of the issues a touring company must deal with. For companies to be successful they need to develop strategies to take account of these issues, so touring becomes a positive experience and an effective way to increase audiences for ballet.

In summary, best professional practice demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Artistic integrity based on a commitment to developing the art form and presenting a balanced programme that challenges and entertains audiences
- A strong governing body and leadership
- A commitment to high quality presentation values and productions
- A financially robust operating model

- A comprehensive communications strategy
- A range of partnerships
- A home base with studios
- An ability to manage change
- A realistic attitude and expectation of what can be achieved

4.4 Model of Practice for Ireland

With consideration to the options for Ireland and the most likely model capable of achieving the goals listed above, research was undertaken in countries with similar populations (see table below).

Country	Population
Norway	4.8m
Ireland	4.5m
Croatia	4.4m
New Zealand	4.3m
Wales	3.1m

In Norway and Croatia, national ballet companies are funded as part of larger cultural institutions. In Norway the ballet company is linked to the opera company based in Oslo and in Croatia the ballet company is part of the National Theatre in Zagreb, which incorporates the theatre company and the opera company. In both cases, these resident companies perform in operas when required and give relatively few performances in their own right. They are virtually unknown outside their home cities and have no international profile. They are state-funded and are judged to fulfil a necessary cultural role for the country and its population. Such models are common and historically well established, particularly in Europe (see Chapter 1). For such a model to be established in Ireland it would probably require a willing partner from another art form with the capacity to embark on such an initiative.. There are practical, physical and geographic considerations involved, in addition to the obvious artistic and management issues. Inevitably this would require a significant amount of funding should a project of this nature be considered possible. In many European countries, the ballet company plays a secondary role, most commonly to an opera company – rarely does ballet enjoy equal opportunity and status with its partner(s) and often these ballet companies struggle to establish their identity and rarely tour. On balance there is not a compelling case to pursue this option in Ireland, unless a willing and enthusiastic potential partner can be easily identified.

The Royal New Zealand Ballet provides a more relevant and interesting model. Currently celebrating its 60th anniversary, it receives funding directly from Government through the Ministry of Culture and Heritage. It employs 32 permanent dancers, gives around 140 performances a year and tours extensively in New Zealand, visiting over 60 venues and occasionally tours internationally. The company reaches audiences totalling over 150,000 each year and through its educational activities reaches a further 18,000 participants. The company balances its programme with full-length classics, established works and commissions at least one new work every year. The company’s annual income of NZ\$10m (€6.2m) comprises NZ\$4.4m (€2.7m) state funding, NZ\$2.5m (€1.5m) from sponsorship/fundraising and NZ\$3.1m (€1.9m) from box office sales. The company’s state funding of NZ\$4.4m represents 44% of the company’s total income with the remaining 56% generated by the company.

The company’s role, and ballet as an art form, is highly regarded in New Zealand. Dance activity in other genres is state-funded through Creative NZ (the country’s equivalent of The Arts Council). The total distribution is just over NZ\$2.5m, which is predominantly for contemporary dance practice.

Closer to home and with significantly less funding than Royal New Zealand Ballet, Ballet Cymru in Wales (population 3.1m) receives £200,000 (€242,400) per year from the Arts Council of Wales. This is matched by a similar amount from box office income, trusts and foundations and other grants/supports. Every year it employs an average of ten dancers for nine months, presents a new work, gives around 45 performances in around 40 venues and reaches an audience of more than 15,000. The company normally presents two programmes each year, often comprising works choreographed by the company's artistic director. It enjoys strong relationships with the Riverfront Theatre in Newport, (which hosts performances and summer workshops and also provides the company with technical and marketing support) and Rubicon Dance (the community dance development organisation for Cardiff and Newport) with whom various successful joint projects have been undertaken.

Ireland deserves a fully professional ballet company that tours nationally, develops the art form, delivers educational activities and engages with local communities. There is a possible operating model that could be developed over time, occupying the middle ground between the Royal New Zealand Ballet and Ballet Cymru models.

A chamber ensemble/company of approximately 16 dancers employed for nine months a year could offer two programmes each year with the possibility of an additional commercial, seasonal, self-funding series of performances of *The Nutcracker*. The repertoire would be based on the principles used extensively by those companies that achieve a balance of programming by drawing on the traditional classics, the acquisition of established works and the commissioning of new ones. Around 18 weeks' rehearsal (three periods of six weeks) would be required to enable 18 weeks' performing/touring (two programmes receiving eight weeks of both performances and two weeks of *The Nutcracker*). The initial annual target would be 100 performances spread across approximately 35 venues. It is envisaged that in addition to the core group of 16 dancers, the company would offer two apprenticeships and would be occasionally augmented by some additional students when required for specific repertory.

A regular touring pattern would have to be established, together with a consortium of partner venues. Relationships with other international ballet companies would need to be developed with a view to co-commissioning new works and possibly establishing an exchange programme for dancers, teachers etc. Sufficient funding to engage guest teachers, producers and répétiteurs would be required, together with resources to provide physiotherapy and health support. The company would also require a home base with studios. To support and facilitate its artistic endeavours the company would need to invest in specialist fundraising, communications and technical support in addition to providing the administrative and financial functions.

The appointment of a strong governing body and the recruitment of an inspirational leadership team – most probably an Artistic Director and a Chief Executive/General Manager - would be critical to the establishment of the company, as well as its future viability and success.

Provisional estimates indicate a chamber ensemble/company operating at the proposed level of activity and presenting high quality performances would require regular annual support/funding of €1.2m. In addition, an estimated one-off payment of €500,000 would be required to establish the governance structure and to appoint key personnel prior to start-up in order to undertake recruitment, planning and booking tours etc. Finally, an initial production budget would have to be agreed.

This level of increased investment in ballet, together with an assurance of ongoing support would secure the ability to plan. It would represent a significant step and would reasonably be expected to trigger the attitudinal shifts required to move professional ballet practice forward in Ireland.

Were an initiative of this nature to occur, it would necessarily require a transition period and agreement on a series of landmarks/targets as part of the process of establishing a new approach to professional ballet provision in Ireland.

Inevitably an initiative of this nature would require careful planning but with an adequate level of investment and shrewd appointments, over a period of time there is potential to develop a creative Irish ballet company of international quality. Ideally the company would be in a position to offer permanent contracts to dancers (i.e. operating year-round rather than for nine months each year) within three years of being established. This would depend on an increase in demand for performances both in Ireland and internationally and the achievement of a strong and financially stable operating model. A serious step change of this nature, perhaps considered radical by some, is the best chance of improving provision, providing continuity and stability and establishing a platform for artistic endeavour and creativity.

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

Historically, in comparison to other European countries, the development of ballet in Ireland has been hindered by the level of available public subsidy. Significant improvement in the quality of professional practice would require a significant rise in public funding.

However, justification for any such increase would require radical change in terms of artistic ambition and the appetite to take the art form forward through creative practice. Attitudes to programming, touring, communications, fundraising and technical support would also have to be reviewed and reconsidered.

There is a fundamental inter-dependency between these elements. Without this shift, the status quo will continue and over time, ballet in Ireland will likely stagnate.

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OTHER SOURCES

Personal Communication with:

Dr. Grainne McArdle (Dance Historian and ballet teacher)

Beverly Dinsmore (Royal Academy of Dancing)

Liz Murphy (International Dance Teachers Association)

Nick Murray and Cynthia Pease (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing)

APPENDIX 1

Arts Council Consultation Process Notes

Consultation Meeting on Ballet

18 September 2013

Session	Education
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Attendees	Job Title	Organisation
Jane Daly	Chair	
Davide Terlingo	Head of Dance	Arts Council
Aine Kelly	Dance Officer	Arts Council
Derek Purnell	Ballet Adviser	Arts Council
Victoria O'Brien	Dance Adviser	Arts Council
Aoife McGrath	Independent Consultant	
Anne Maher	Director	Ballet Ireland
Fraser Brown	CEO	Monica Loughman Ballet
Alan Foley	Artistic Director	Cork City Ballet
Katherine Lewis	Artistic Director	Irish National Youth Ballet
Joanna Banks	Director	College of Dance
Marian Lennon	Dance Course Director	Inchicore College of Further Education
Gráinne McArdle	Ballet School Director/ Dance Historian	Celbridge School of Ballet
Judith Sibley	Artistic Director	Chrysalis Dance and Youth Ballet West
Jane Magan	Dancer	Ballet Ireland/Chrysalis/Cork City Ballet
Anica Louw	Director	Shawbrook
Katherine O'Malley	Dancer/Teacher	Liz Roche Company
Leanne Sexton	Dance Student	Monica Loughman Ballet
Saoirse Delaney	Dance Student	Irish National Youth Ballet

1. Questions for discussion

The meeting discussed the following topics:

- 1.1 How should professional dance education be structured in Ireland? Is there a need for a national dance academy? If so, what form might such an academy take?
- 1.2 How should professional dance education be linked with professional dance practice in Ireland?

- 1.3 How does professional dance education in Ireland need to be developed? What would assist this development?
- 1.4 What impediments are there to the development of professional dance education in Ireland and how can these be tackled?

2. In discussing the topics, the following emerged:

- 2.1 There was general consensus that full-time professional dance education should be integrated within the formal education system. Academic and secondary education ideally should run in parallel to vocational training. For example: students need to continue to study for Junior and Leaving Certificate exams while in full-time training – currently this is not possible in Ireland, therefore formal academic education need to be sacrificed for ballet training.
- 2.2 There was general consensus that formal accreditation was important for any professional dance training in Ireland. There was an agreement that formal accreditation would ensure that graduates of a national dance academy who do not go on to professional careers in performance would still have a suitable foundation for further education and alternative professions. Many agreed that, in their direct experience, this is a main area of concern for parents when considering a professional dance career for their children.
- 2.3 For full time training to start at 16yrs is probably too late for many students. This highlights the inadequacies of some training in Ireland pre 16yrs. Several participants suggested that qualifications acquired through ballet examinations should be recognised and awarded credit within the Irish education system. These should be placed on the Qualifications Framework in the same way as they are in England and Scotland (e.g. RAD examinations accrue UCAS points in the UK).
- 2.4 Any training course should be accredited and result in students obtaining a BA. Several participants agreed that a BA degree that combined ballet and contemporary dance training would be a good option and thought that this would be the most effective way of recruiting students. The BA at the Royal Conservatory of Scotland (linked to Scottish Ballet) was cited as a possible model. The Conservatoire schools/colleges Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and Central School in the UK were also mentioned as examples of vocational training in the context of a BA degree. It was agreed that this type of integrated training would offer more possibilities and would probably have a better chance of success.
- 2.5 There was clear consensus that the current placement of dance within the physical education curriculum at primary and secondary level is detrimental to the perception of dance in Ireland. Dance should be placed within the arts curriculum as a discrete subject. The location of dance within the Physical Education & Sport syllabus in primary schools was a recurring theme. Most felt that this was one of the biggest impediments to the art form in Ireland. Many voiced the need for a policy shift regarding this matter.
- 2.6 Two questions were raised: does Ireland have a population sufficiently large to provide for a full-time ballet academy and, due it peripheral location versus main European capital cities, is it possible to create an institution that can attract suitable talents and train dancers to a sufficiently high level to work in an international context? There was general agreement that if it is to be viable, and in order to justify its existence, a National Dance Academy must be slim and concentrate on the delivery of the highest international standard. It is unlikely that any dance education model would be sustainable with Irish students only. It is important to achieve standards capable to attract international students, as the academy would have to compete with established schools abroad.

- 2.7 Attendees agreed that in the absence of such an academy, bursary funding should be re-instated to support Irish students travelling overseas for vocational dance education. Going abroad to train can be an enriching experience that enables students to see the quality of other students and the competitive nature of a professional career.

Session	Professional Practice		
	Attendees	Job Title	Organisation
	Jane Daly	Chair	
	Davide Terlingo	Head of Dance	Arts Council
	John O’Kane	Arts Director	Arts Council
	Aine Kelly	Dance Officer	Arts Council
	Derek Purnell	Ballet Adviser	Arts Council
	Victoria O’Brien	Dance Adviser	Arts Council
	Aoife McGrath	Independent Consultant	
	Anne Maher	Director	Ballet Ireland
	Fraser Brown/ Monica Loughman	CEO/Artistic Director	Monica Loughman Ballet
	Alan Foley	Artistic Director	Cork City Ballet
	Katherine Lewis	Artistic Director	Irish National Youth Ballet
	Joanna Banks	Director	College of Dance
	Marian Lennon	Dance Course Director	Inchicore College of F. E.
	Judith Sibley	Artistic Director	Chrysalis Dance/ Youth Ballet West
	Jane Magan	Dancer	Ballet Ireland/ Chrysalis/Cork City Ballet
	Anica Louw	Director	Shawbrook
	Katherine O’Malley	Dancer/Teacher	Liz Roche Company

3. Questions for discussion

The meeting discussed the following topics:

- 3.1 What constitutes best professional practice in ballet?
- 3.2 Are there examples of good practice that might be relevant to Ireland?
- 3.3 What are the central issues and perceived difficulties/factors in creating and presenting professional work in Ireland?

4. In discussing the topics, the following emerged:

- 4.1 A 12-month contract for dancers was seen as an important factor in establishing best practice. It was considered that this offered opportunities to develop dancers, operate on different scales, broaden the repertory and establish an audience that followed a company rather than making choices based purely on repertory. Ultimately it was agreed that ‘best practice’ had to be viewed in an international context if it was to have any credibility. This issue was a recurring theme during this session and was voiced at different points throughout the session.
- 4.2 Comparisons were drawn with European companies offering 12-month contracts – see 2.1 above. It was also noted that in many countries dancers benefitted from pensions, healthcare, physiotherapy provision, holiday pay and other employment legislation. It was acknowledged that, at current level of funding, Ireland would only be able to support one ballet company (or dance company more generally) if this model was adopted.
- 4.3 It was suggested that the word ‘professional’ was often misused, and whilst it was agreed that technically it applied to those earning their living through dancing, it also was an adjective describing the behaviour, attitude and attributes of a dancer/performer – this had to be earned and was not necessarily achieved through attendance at training courses etc. Several felt that it was dancers who are of an international standard.
- 4.4 The need for a breadth of repertoire was discussed. The role of the ‘classics’ was acknowledged as was the need for dancers to experience different choreographic influences and styles. The need to nurture choreographic talent was also mentioned. Some thought that repertoire should be broad and not focused on the imprint of a single artist. One participant suggested the importance of new works that are “relevant” to contemporary society because ballet is a living art form. There was some discussion of the necessity of well-attended classics (e.g. Nutcracker) that would then support more experimental work of a full-time company. One participant highlighted the difficulty of the high cost of performing rights for popular repertoire (Kylia, Balanchine). One participant highlighted the importance of a “balance” between traditional classics and “new narrative works” that are presented in tandem with an educational outreach programme.
- 4.5 Several examples were given of where ballet companies benefitted from working collaboratively with partner organisations e.g. orchestras, co-commissions with other ballet companies, venues that effectively become a company’s ‘home’. There was general agreement that collaborations with other art forms (opera/orchestras) are important aspects of professional practice. The German model was cited as an example.
- 4.6 Much discussion took place about perceptions of ballet in Ireland. It was felt that a very narrow view of ballet was held and it was a struggle to change attitudes. Comparisons were drawn with public attitudes to music and drama/literature in Ireland – described as part of the nation’s DNA. Ballet suffered in Ireland due a lack of awareness and exposure to a broader, high-quality repertory, compounded by a lack of knowledgeable press/critics and lack of engagement amongst some venue managers, teachers and parents. The perception of ballet in Ireland and its profile was also raised again at this time.
- 4.7 The issue of Project Award funding was discussed next. Some attendees questioned the maximum amount of Project Award available to Dance (€ 40,000) as opposed to Theatre (€ 100,000) and discussed how this impacted their practice. There was some discussion about the difficulty of balancing administration tasks with creative tasks when relying on project funding because ongoing admin tasks are not supported.
- 4.8 It was acknowledged that Ireland is well served with venues (of varying scales) throughout the country, many of whom are well suited to presenting dance. However the absence of a suitable mid-scale venue in Dublin was seen as an issue. With such a venue, seasons of dance

of a varied nature – perhaps in collaboration with contemporary companies, could be presented.

- 4.9 Some attendees felt that ballet did not have a united voice in Ireland, and in addition, there is little respect of true knowledge of the art form in this country. This point was accepted as quite true and discussed further. The competition for funding was recognised as a potentially divisive factor but there was a hope expressed that for the greater good and the development of the art form in Ireland, personal agendas could be set aside.
- 4.10 The notion of “what are the factors that would make a compelling case for funding ballet” was brought up. Artistic vision, a collective voice, the creation of new work, an educated press/designated ballet reviewer and co-commissioning of work were suggested. Some implied that Irish ballet’s repertoire is limited because of the available funding. This lead back to the previous conversation on a full-time company with dancers contracted for 12 months of the year.

Session	Audience Development	
Attendees	Job Title	Organisation
Jane Daly	Chair	
Davide Terlingo	Head of Dance	Arts Council
John O’Kane	Arts Director	Arts Council
Aine Kelly	Dance Officer	Arts Council
Derek Purnell	Ballet Adviser	Arts Council
Victoria O’Brien	Dance Adviser	Arts Council
Aoife McGrath	Independent Consultant	
Anne Maher	Director	Ballet Ireland
Fraser Brown	CEO	Monica Loughman Ballet
Alan Foley	Artistic Director	Cork City Ballet
Katherine Lewis	Artistic Director	Irish National Youth Ballet
Joanna Banks	Director	College of Dance
Judith Sibley	Artistic Director	Chrysalis Dance/ Youth Ballet West
Anica Louw	Director	Shawbrook
Katherine O’Malley	Dancer/Teacher	Liz Roche Company
Brid Dukes	Artistic Director	Civic Theatre
Mike Adamson	CEO	Live Nation

5. Questions for discussion

The meeting discussed the following topics:

- 5.1 What are the central issues and perceived difficulties/factors in developing audiences for ballet in Ireland? – what are the barriers to attendance?
- 5.2 How can the audience demographic and profile be diversified?
- 5.3 How should the decline in those participating in ballet be addressed?

6. In discussing the topics, the following emerged:

- 6.1 Irish audiences (and some venue managers) appear to prefer safe ‘classics’ on the basis that unknown repertory represents too great a ‘risk.’ There is a very conservative attitude to new work. It is difficult to introduce new works that address contemporary issues. This is perhaps the consequence of an under-exposed and under-educated Irish market, impresarios and programmers solely interested in ticket sales are not always aware of what constitutes good and mediocre ballet.
- 6.2 There was a discussion of the need to educate audiences as to the difference between touring companies of a high standard (e.g. Birmingham Royal Ballet) and companies who tour work of a lower quality (some touring Russian productions were cited as examples of low quality productions that leave audiences disappointed). There was a discussion of a general perception held by audiences in Ireland that all Russian ballet is good – this was considered a very outdated perception by most participants. It was acknowledged that audiences have a misplaced notion that all things ‘Russian’ represent high quality. Historically, with visits of the Bolshoi and Kirov companies, Irish audiences saw the very best Russian companies but these companies have not been presented in Ireland for many years and the more recent companies are not of that standard.
- 6.3 There was a lengthy discussion of how to collect data about audiences. The current provision for data collection was found to be insufficient from the perspective of companies. The issues relating to Data Protection were raised. Venues were happier with the systems they have in place (e.g. questionnaires distributed in foyers). It was agreed that a centralised system for data collection should be set up.
- 6.4 Greater collaborative working between companies and venues will help to build confidence in the company. Audiences may then attend performances based on the reputation of the company rather than just dependent on repertory. The importance and benefits of developing a long-standing relationship with a venue was highlighted. It was agreed that good rapport between the two can help to develop the audience’s exposure to new works as well as progressing the audience base. In broader terms, collaborative working between interested parties e.g. companies, independent practitioners, venues, ballet teachers, educationalists, dance students, community groups, schools etc. should be encouraged.
- 6.5 In terms of audience diversification it was proposed that ballet needs more advocates and champions to raise awareness and profile of the artform. The lack of high-profile Irish ballet dancers was considered a drawback in this regard. Creating and presenting work that is more relevant to contemporary audiences could widen the demographic attending performances.
- 6.6 It was suggested that the considerable amount of young people taking ballet classes is a wonderful resource and could be tapped into. More could be done to encourage ballet students to attend a wider range of performances. This would require a combination of

relevant approaches e.g. attitudinal shifts amongst some ballet teachers and parents, concessionary ticket pricing, more targeted outreach work by companies. It was acknowledged that the very large number of ballet students connected to the vast network of private dance schools in Ireland holds a significant audience growth potential. Although questions remained on how they could be resourced, ballet teachers should be encouraged to increase their knowledge and skills, the education sector should recognise dance as a discreet area for study and companies should provide as much professional input as possible through outreach programmes, Summer Schools etc.

- 6.7 An increased awareness and understanding of ballet could be achieved through more outreach projects, educational initiatives and targeted events - including those for adults (e.g. pre and post performance talks). Many of the attendees suggested that the larger venues in Dublin could help to develop an informed audience by programming international companies and more diverse works. Others felt that workshops/talks by the touring national companies certainly impact positively on audience numbers as well as helping to develop young people's participation/engagement with the art. There was general agreement that a programme of outreach activities and talks are highly beneficial in increasing awareness of a production (increased ticket sales) and in preparing an audience for the content of a production (positive reception).

APPENDIX 2

About the Authors

Dr. Aoife McGrath

Dr Aoife McGrath is a lecturer in the School of Creative Arts, Queen's University Belfast, where she teaches dance and theatre studies. She has also worked as a classical ballet and contemporary dancer, a choreographer, a dance critic, and as dance adviser for the Irish Arts Council. She has published several articles and book chapters on dance in Ireland and her monograph, *Dance Theatre in Ireland: Revolutionary Moves* (2013) was recently published by Palgrave Macmillan. She is the co-convenor of the Choreography and Corporeality Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research.

Derek Parnell

Prior to being recently appointed as Director of Public Engagement at The Wallace Collection, Derek Parnell worked as an Arts Consultant undertaking a variety of projects for a range of organisations including Norfolk Dance, Tilted Production, Siobhan Davies Dance Company, Rambert Dance Company, Central School of Ballet, Elmhurst School for Dance, The Royal Ballet School, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Arts Council Ireland, Scottish Government and Bejart Ballet Lausanne. He served as Chief Executive of Birmingham Royal Ballet, having played a significant role in the company's relocation from Sadler's Wells to Birmingham. Prior to his administrative career, he was a senior soloist with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet having trained at the Royal Ballet Upper School.

Dr. Victoria O'Brien

Victoria O'Brien started her training at the Irish National College of Dance in Dublin, and is a graduate of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds. She undertook further studies at the Laban Centre, London, and completed a PhD in dance history at the University of Limerick. She is currently Dance Adviser at the Arts Council. In previous roles, Victoria has acted as Artistic Programme Director for Step Up: Dance Project, Development Officer for the National Dance Archive of Ireland at the Glucksman Library, and General Manager for Dublin Youth Dance Company & the Irish Youth Dance Festival. An active dance historian, Victoria continues to research and publish in the areas of Irish ballet and cultural memory. Her monograph "A History of Irish Ballet from 1927 to 1963" was published by Peter Lang in 2011.