

# EVERYTHING WE LOVED ABOUT DANCE WAS TAKEN

THE PLACE OF DANCE IN UK EDUCATION



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## 1. FOREWORD

There is no doubt that, over the last decade, dance has been marginalised as an educational subject in the UK. Shifting educational trends and priorities, a focus on a ‘*knowledge-based*’ curriculum and changes to school performance measures have all played a part in the decline of dance in the curriculum.

At a time of significant challenge for the dance education sector, the world was forced to navigate its way through a global pandemic, with unprecedented demand and pressure on the education system, placing dance education in a dangerously precarious and vulnerable position.

Does this have to be the case?

The argument for ensuring dance not only survives as a curriculum subject but thrives, and that its rightful place is at the heart of the education system is very convincing. The enormously positive benefits of dance participation on physical and mental wellbeing are extremely well documented. At a time when the nation’s young people are facing the perfect storm of an obesity crisis and a mental health epidemic, it seems dance - and its unique blend of physicality and creativity - is a vital and incredibly effective tool in addressing the needs of young people.

Furthermore, the enormous growth and potential of the creative industries in the UK, and their significant contribution to the UK economy, logically suggests that dance should be highly valued and respected. Sadly, we hear time and time again that this is far from the case. We need to work harder than ever to ensure dance is taken seriously and championed within education.

This research presents a picture of the trends and concerns around dance education, as reported by those teaching dance in educational settings in the UK. While the picture is, at times, a bleak one – and there are certainly challenges ahead – as a nation we are also presented with a unique opportunity to look afresh at dance education provision in the UK. The disruption of COVID-19 and the resulting ‘*educational reboot*’ gives us an opportunity to re-evaluate, revisit and rebuild.

Access to high-quality dance education is, I believe, the birth right of every child, not a luxury or a ‘*nice to have*’ for those that can afford it. Our research sets out recommendations to ensure that all children and young people in the UK can access it, and benefit from the power of dance.



**Andrew Hurst**  
Chief Executive, One Dance UK

## 2. BACKGROUND

One Dance UK is the Subject Association for Dance advocating for the importance and value of high-quality dance education and training. We strive to ensure that children and young people across the UK have access to dance, both inside and outside of school.

In local authority schools in **England**, dance is a compulsory activity within the Physical Education curriculum at Key Stages 1, 2 & 3 (ages 5 – 14). The requirements of this aspect of the curriculum are to: perform dances using simple movement patterns (Key Stage 1); perform dances using a range of movement patterns (Key Stage 2); and perform dances using advanced dance techniques within a range of dance styles and forms (Key Stage 3). Academies and Free Schools are not required to deliver the National Curriculum.

In **Scotland**, dance is part of the Expressive Arts curriculum, with requirements for students to participate in performances and have opportunities to create, explore and develop their skills and techniques.

In **Wales**, a new curriculum is being designed where dance will also be part of an Expressive Arts area. It is not yet clear what the requirements and expectations will be, but the step to embed dance within children's curriculum entitlement is a positive one.

Dance is also part of the Physical Education curriculum in **Northern Ireland**, with the primary curriculum requiring all students be '*given opportunities to respond to a variety of stimuli and the use of body movements to communicate ideas and express feelings*'. For older students in Northern Ireland (aged 11 – 14), dance remains in the Physical Education curriculum however is not a statutory requirement.



How dance is *actually* delivered varies greatly in different educational settings, with dance fully embedded as part of the curriculum in some schools whilst non-existent in others. For those schools delivering dance, some employ specialist dance teachers, others cover dance within their PE lessons, or hire sports companies or freelance artists to deliver dance content. This means that opportunities for students to access dance in school are somewhat of a '*postcode lottery*', dependent on where they live and which school they attend.

In primary settings in England, the Sports Premium fund can be used to support dance delivery, with funding available to upskill staff and develop their dance knowledge and experience, so that they are equipped to deliver high-quality dance lessons without feeling the need to be an '*expert dancer*' themselves. Initiatives such as this go some way to improving the quality of dance provision – but only if a school chooses to spend the premium in this way. The annual Taking Part survey from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) evidences the impact of this funding, as the number of students aged 5 to 10 years engaging in dance has increased by 12% since 2016, a significant change which has not been mirrored in students aged 11-15 years in secondary education where this funding is not available. Worryingly, in the most recent report<sup>1</sup> just 29.9% of 11 – 15-year-olds are engaging in dance. This suggests the factors causing the decline in the uptake of dance are most prevalent within this age group.

Across the devolved nations, no such Sports Premium exists, though it is possible to secure funding through other sources such as National Lottery funding and Sport Scotland. In terms of engagement in dance, in 2019 Arts Council Wales reported that participation in dance continued decreasing, dropping from 24% in 2013 to 20.3% in 2019<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 42% of children and young people engaging in dance take classes in their own time, with 45.6% participating in dance activities in school. In 2018, just 16% of primary and 5% of post-primary aged children in Northern Ireland reported participating in dance within the past year<sup>3</sup>.

For students aged 14-18, a range of dance-based qualifications can be undertaken as one of their elective options subjects. This includes, but is not limited to, AQA GCSE and A Level Dance, BTEC Levels 1, 2 and 3 Performing Arts, RSL Levels 1, 2 and 3 Performing Arts and UAL Levels 1/2 Performing Arts. Recent years have shown a severe decline in the uptake of two dance-based qualifications (GCSE & A level dance), echoing the Taking Part data. There has, however, been a steady increase in uptake of vocational qualifications at Levels 1, 2 and 3, indicating that some schools and students are simply changing qualification rather than not studying dance at all.



Outside of timetabled teaching hours, dance is regularly offered as an extra-curricular activity, with schools often running lunchtime or after school clubs, dance companies, workshops, and other unique opportunities. It is evident that there is a real need for this type of activity, as Sport England reports dance to be one of the top 10 most prevalent activities for children aged 5 – 16 years<sup>4</sup>. Data from out of school settings also evidences the popularity of dance as an activity. In 2021 the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT) reported awarding organisations offering graded examinations receiving 725,000 entries in dance exams (39% of total examinations). However, dance in out of school settings often has a cost implication, meaning only students from more affluent backgrounds are likely to be able to engage in these types of dance activity. If time allocated to dance as part of the curriculum is reduced, or even non-existent, then there is a very real risk of dance becoming the *'privilege of the elite'* - something that is already happening with arts opportunities more prevalent in the independent (private) school sector.



For several years dance in education has been under threat, battling against a series of external measures such as funding cuts, the introduction of the EBacc accountability measure and Government prioritisation of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). In addition the regular use of derogatory language from Government and the media describing dance and other creative subjects as *'low value'*, *'non-priority'* and *'dead-end'* has affected how both children and adults view dance as a subject choice. These factors have led to a catastrophic decline in uptake of GCSE and A Level dance (over 50% since 2008), a reduction in timetabled dance teaching hours and a decrease in the number of dance teachers working in school settings<sup>5</sup>. The disruption and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this further, with students learning from home via screens, studios closed, extra-curricular clubs cancelled and all arts-related activity seemingly the lowest priority on the Government's *'to-do'* list.



Time and time again, research demonstrates that dance can play an important role in a child or young person's life. Studies have shown how dance can increase feelings of happiness, confidence, and self-esteem<sup>6, 7</sup> as well as being a much-enjoyed form of physical activity that doesn't come with the pressure of competition that many team sports have which can affect enjoyment and uptake, particularly with teenage girls<sup>8</sup>. The recent social impact report from the Sport and Recreation Alliance documents the positive effects participating in dance can have in creating a *'healthier and happier nation'*<sup>9</sup>.

The significant positive impact studying dance can have on a young person's life, and the challenge of ensuring dance is valued in schools in the same way as other subjects are the key motivators for this report. Currently the UK is gripped by both obesity and mental health crises, with numbers of those who are classified as obese or suffering from poor mental health continuing to rise as a result of the pandemic. There is also a worrying question mark hovering over where new dance talent will emerge from in the UK. If dance education continues to be *'stripped back'* and becomes the privilege of the affluent few, where will the next generation of talented dancers, choreographers and creatives emerge from?

Through this research, One Dance UK aims to set out a clearer picture of the current dance landscape in schools, identifying areas of concern and the underlying reasons, whilst also considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We firmly believe that access to high-quality dance is the birth right of every child and young person – not a luxury or a *'nice to have'* – and call upon government, education leaders and other stakeholders to ensure this entitlement is fulfilled.



# 3. HEADLINE FINDINGS

To gain an accurate picture of the current dance education landscape and inform our advocacy work, One Dance UK surveyed educators across the four nations to gather information about the lasting impact of the pandemic, including those working in dance education in any capacity. The One Dance UK Dance Education survey was launched in April 2021 and ran until 24 May 2021. One Dance UK received 354 responses during that time.



The majority of respondents identified as **female (90%), White British (84%)** and aged between **21-40 years (64%)**.



There was a geographical spread of educators working in settings across the UK, with the highest percentage based in **London (21%)** and lowest percentages in **Northern Ireland (0.9%)** and **Wales (2.8%)**.



Although there were responses from educators working in a range of different settings, the majority were working in **secondary (49.4%), sixth form (12.4%)** and **primary (11.9%)** settings.



**59%** of the respondents held either **Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)** or **Qualified Teaching and Learning Status (QTLS)**.

# 1. THE DECLINE IN DANCE IN SCHOOL IS DUE TO EXTERNAL PRESSURES, NOT A LACK OF ENGAGEMENT

In secondary education, **66%** of educators reported a decline in the uptake of dance qualifications for students aged 14 and over.

**Dance in Schools:** 49% of educators cited external pressure for students to take 'academic subjects' as the key reason for the ongoing decline of dance in schools. Other integral factors included school leaders wanting students to take EBacc subjects (46%) and pressure from parents/carers to take other subjects (46%).

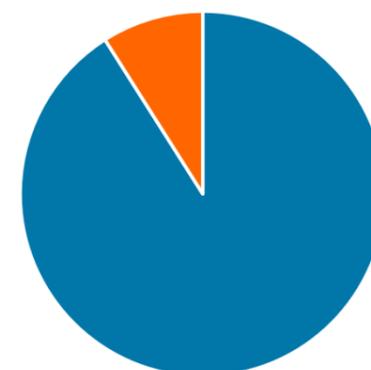
*"Higher ability students often want to do dance but are forced to select EBacc subjects, leaving 1 open option with 10 other subjects being offered. It really is a battle for survival".*

*"Dance has ridden many storms and survived, but now dance education is being removed from state funded settings, students who would not have access to experience dance will never have the opportunity. I fear dance is moving back to only being there for the privileged and elite."*

# 2. THE DAY-TO-DAY DELIVERY OF DANCE IN EDUCATION HAS CHANGED MONUMENTALLY DUE TO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

**100%** of survey respondents had a change in teaching space over the last 12 months, with many unable to teach a full range of practical activities or skills, due to being in an unsuitable space, such as a classroom.

% of teachers who experience a temporary or permanent change to their teaching space



**Breakdown:** 91% of educators reported a temporary change of teaching space, with 9% reporting a permanent change.

■ Temporary change to teaching space ■ Permanent change to teaching space

## COVID-19 Implications

The three biggest challenges to dance teaching during the pandemic were:

- Delivering lessons remotely (66%)
- The lack of extra-curricular dance and performance opportunities (57%)
- Social distancing on the return to classrooms was also identified as one of the biggest challenges to dance teaching (50%)

*“Observing the students’ resilience to their studies has been empowering.”*

*“The loss of amazing opportunities for the students makes the course seem less enjoyable and more assessment driven.”*

## A STRONG EXTRA-CURRICULAR DANCE OFFER IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF DANCE IN EDUCATION

**Even as we emerge from the pandemic, less children are being offered dance as an extra-curricular activity**

The percentage of educators able to offer a high amount (7 or more hours) of weekly extra-curricular dance activity in their school has reduced from 22% (pre-pandemic) to 13% for September 2021. To coincide with this, report findings also show more schools are offering 1 hour or less, or even no extra-curricular dance activity.

58% of respondents reported that extra-curricular dance activity was cancelled at a whole school level during the pandemic, despite this type of activity being permitted under government guidelines.

**Freelance dance artists are often engaged to deliver extra-curricular dance**

One third of educators (33%) reported that visiting artists were cancelled during the pandemic, and due to this extra-curricular dance was cancelled.

*“We lost all the value and importance of enrichment activities such as working with professional artists, seeing live performances and losing opportunities to perform.”*

The long-term impact of the pandemic on the freelance dance workforce is evident, as the number of educators engaging with no visiting artists has doubled from 16% pre-pandemic to 30% for September 2021.

*“Everything we loved about dance was taken. When we returned all focus was on other subjects – no space, no extra-curricular, only intervention for EBacc subjects.”*



## 3. POST-PANDEMIC, THERE ARE LESS DANCE EDUCATORS, AND LESS HOURS ALLOCATED TO DANCE TEACHING, IN SCHOOLS

Dance educators are being given less timetabled dance teaching hours post-pandemic. Since March 2020, the average number of curriculum dance teaching hours on teachers’ weekly timetables has dropped from 13.5 (pre-pandemic) to 11.7 (September 2021).

*“The amount of time given to dance and other arts subjects in the curriculum has been significantly reduced due to the EBacc and its focus on STEM subjects. This makes delivery of dance courses very challenging.”*

Timetabled Teaching Hours	Pre-pandemic	Post-pandemic
0	3%	7%
1-5	14%	17%
6 -10	18%	19%
11 -15	23%	18%
16 -20	20%	19%
21 +	22%	17%

A third of educators reported reductions in dance staffing during the pandemic and staggeringly 76% of respondents identified long term or permanent cuts caused by dance curriculum hours being cut or redundancy/restructure of staffing model.

## 4. SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING FOR BOTH STAFF AND STUDENTS.

### MENTAL WELLBEING

81% of educators reported their student's mental wellbeing had declined.  
63% of educators state their own mental wellbeing had declined.

*"Once we returned...not only do they have work to complete but their current ability is worse than when they ended Year 10 - so they all feel they have got worse and are now being assessed."*

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

Students appear to be less fit physically since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 79% of educators stating their students' physical fitness has declined.

*"Student wellbeing and mental health has been a huge issue with regards to managing my job since the pandemic. This was already an issue but has increased significantly."*

Educators reporting on their own physical health gave a mixed picture, however over half (56%) reported a decline in physical fitness compared to 25% reporting an improvement.

## 5. THE FUTURE OF DANCE IN EDUCATION IS IN A PRECARIOUS POSITION

### When reflecting on the past ten years, dance educators report:

Dance teaching has become more difficult (62%), with 33% stating teaching dance has become 'slightly more difficult' and 29% reporting teaching dance is now 'a lot more difficult'.

Almost two thirds of dance educators (61%) report they have noticed a decline in the uptake of dance qualifications during this time.

### A child's opportunity to study dance is heavily dependent on where they study.

*"Even in my school which has always been supportive of the arts such focus has been placed on academic progress since the return to school I am concerned dance will start to be pushed out or used as time for children who are 'behind' to catch up."*

*"In my own specific situation I am incredibly lucky that I have a hugely supportive headteacher and senior team who are looking to expand Dance across the school both within & without the curriculum."*



# 3.1 THE DECLINE IN DANCE

Since 2010, a decline in the availability of dance in schools has been evident, with a significant reduction in curriculum hours and specialist teachers spanning a decade and beginning to plateau in 2020<sup>5, 10</sup>. Responses submitted support this narrative, as two thirds (66%) of educators reported a decline in the uptake of dance qualifications in their settings. This is most evident in England at Key Stage 4, as despite some increases in uptake of vocational qualifications at Levels 1, 2 and 3, GCSE and A Level Dance have seen uptake reduce by over 50% across ten years (2010 – 2020). Scottish respondents report experiencing ‘drastically low numbers at NQ level’, whilst in Wales the recent consultation carried out by Qualifications Wales (The Right Choice for Wales) suggests that GCSE Dance may no longer be funded for delivery, with no current plans to design a Welsh equivalent and private dance qualifications suggested as an alternative option.

**“The EBacc accountability measure has meant the options are limited for students. Students have 1 option and have to make difficult decisions. Due to low uptake, SLT (Senior Leadership Team) then cut the course.”**



One factor has been identified as the most significant reason for the decline in the uptake of dance in England, not only by respondents but also by several educational organisations – the introduction of the EBacc accountability measure. Introduced as a measure of school performance by the Government in 2010 (around the same time numbers studying GCSE and A Level dance began to fall), the EBacc measures the achievement of schools based on the numbers of pupils who have gained Key Stage 4 (GCSE level) qualifications in English, Mathematics, History or Geography, the sciences and a language. The reasoning behind this was “to increase the take-up of ‘core’ academic qualifications that best equip a pupil for progression to further study and work.”<sup>11</sup>.

When educators were asked to identify reasons contributing to the current decline in dance, the level of student engagement was cited as the least likely reason for the decline, with just 8% of survey respondents stating this. By contrast, an overwhelming 49% of educators stated that students’ belief that they would benefit from taking ‘academic subjects’ was the key reason for the ongoing decline of dance in schools. Nearly as many respondents cited school leaders wanting students to take EBacc subjects (46%) and pressure from parents/carers to take other subjects (46%) as the main reasons for the decline.

Whilst EBacc subjects continue to account for the majority of GCSE entries overall (82%), the figures on the number of students completing the EBacc suite of qualifications are nowhere near the target anticipated by the Government. It was projected that by 2022, 75% of students would be completing the EBacc suite of qualifications, whereas in both 2019 and 2020, only 40% of students were entered for the full EBacc suite of qualifications. There have been many calls for the accountability measure to be ‘scrapped’, which would go some way to removing the focus on ‘core’ subjects/subjects viewed by some as ‘more academic’, and instead demonstrate the value of all subjects. The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) ‘Bacc for the Future’ Campaign, of which One Dance UK is a founder member, outlines how the EBacc ‘undermines creativity in schools’ and excludes creative subjects such as dance from performance league tables<sup>12</sup>.



**“Too many parents/schools regard [Dance] as a non-academic subject (at GCSE and A Level) and therefore the challenge is getting them to change their mindset, and to show them that studying Dance in an educational setting is more beneficial to their child’s future career than they think. Not everyone who studies Dance wants to be a professional dancer!”**

By simply ‘crunching the numbers’ some may draw the conclusion that children and young people simply aren’t as interested in studying dance as they are other subjects. However, it seems very clear from the findings of this research, coupled with data that explores activity in out-of-school settings, that it is the pressures of the EBacc accountability measure and nationwide focus on subjects that are perceived to be ‘more academic’ and of ‘more value’ to students’ future careers that are causing this detrimental effect on dance in education. When children and young people are questioned about their participation and enjoyment of dance in out-of-school settings, a very different picture emerges. In their 2020 ‘Girls Active’ report<sup>8</sup>, Youth Sport Trust found that when asked what activity they most like to do, dance was voted third most popular (19%) by teenage girls. The annual Taking Part survey, which for 5 to 10-year-olds only collects data on activity that takes place outside of school, has reported a vast increase in the number of girls choosing to take part in dance, rising from 42% in 2011 to 53% in 2019<sup>1</sup>. In the private dance sector, the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre this year reported that awarding organisations offering graded examinations had 725,000 entries in dance exams (39% of total examinations).



Between 2017 and 2019 in Scotland, YDance delivered 'Shake It Up'<sup>15</sup>, an interdisciplinary dance project for Scottish primary schools. Through evaluation the project was found to have had a positive impact on pupils and staff, promoting learner engagement, self-confidence, social skills and wellbeing. Other positive findings include the success of the project to engage pupils who were seen as less likely to engage with other lessons, with parents also reporting the positive impact of the programme on their children's overall confidence and engagement with learning.

**“Government and national bodies encourage STEM (not STEAM) and schools have to follow suit. There is an increasing lack of awareness of what dance can be, who it is for and how it can be used, beyond transferable skills, as a tool for social engagement, confidence, mental health and the learning of subject matter.”**

In primary education settings, researchers have explored how dance can be used as a tool for cross-curricular learning, using creative, practical tasks to reinforce and enhance classroom-based learning. According to Sport England's 2020 report 'Social Return on Investment of Sport and Physical Activity in England'<sup>13</sup>, participating in sport and physical activity leads to at least a 1% increase in educational attainment for students aged 11-18. Bowen and Kisida<sup>14</sup> found that students increase their level of achievement in writing, receive less disciplinary action, and demonstrate increased compassion after an increase in arts educational experiences. The power dance has to support learning in other subjects and develop key social skills only reinforces the need for the value of dance to be upheld in every educational institution and utilised to its full potential.



Many teachers are fearful of the long-term impact of this decline, and what this could mean not only for dance in schools but also the future creative workforce. With the recent introduction of T-levels replacing many vocational qualifications at Key Stage 5, and no plans to introduce a Performing Arts T-level, it seems that the value and importance of arts subjects has been overlooked. The Level 3 consultation outcome<sup>16</sup> indicates that some performing/creative arts Level 3 courses will continue to be funded. However, at the time of publication exam boards were waiting to see exactly what this means for their courses. The Creative Industries Federation and Creative Industries Council regularly report how much the creative industries contributed to the UK economy pre COVID-19, and project an increase of 300,000 jobs by 2025 as part of the post-pandemic recovery<sup>17</sup>. If creative subjects are no longer seen to be a viable study option for our children and young people, who will have the skills needed for these roles, and what impact will this have on the wider economy?

**“You can sing from the rooftops about how wonderful the subject is, organise lots of trips, workshops, performances, primary liaison, etc... but if it is not valued then it is very difficult to maintain high numbers.”**

Dance is certainly not the only creative educational subject facing challenges. In August 2021 Arts Professional published an article<sup>18</sup> alerting their readers to fears that “music A-levels could disappear from some regions by 2033”. With the aim of rectifying this desperate situation, the National Plan for Music Education has resumed after a year's delay due to the pandemic. Despite this, it may not be enough to remedy the impact of the EBacc, with A level Music uptake dropping by 44% over the last ten years. This follows the same narrative as the decrease in uptake for A level Dance, only the numbers for dance have reduced even more significantly, with a 50% decrease across the same period, yet astoundingly there is no similar Government plan in place for Dance Education – no ‘alarm bells sounding’ or ‘plan of attack’ to ensure the place of dance in education is safe and it remains accessible to all children and young people. In fact, as of September 2021, it was announced that £270m funding allocated to an Arts Premium in secondary schools has been put on hold<sup>19</sup>. The evidence supports the belief of respondents – that dance is not valued in the same way as other subjects, even other creative and arts-based subjects– and until it is, this battle will be ongoing. As outlined in our recommendations (Section 4), we call on the UK Government and devolved administrations and all those working in educational leadership to make a commitment to securing the place of dance in the curriculum, and advocate for high-quality dance for all children and young people. As the sector support organisation and Subject Association for dance it is our priority to ensure that dance is championed at every level, from grass roots to Government, and we make the strongest case for the benefits of dance education for all.

# 3.2 CURRICULUM TIME & RESOURCES

It has been reported for several years by the Cultural Learning Alliance and others that there has been a steady decline in the proportion of timetabled hours given to arts subjects, and the number of arts teachers working in schools. In August 2019, it was reported that the number of hours the arts were taught in England's secondary schools had fallen by 23% since 2010, and the number of arts teachers fell by 22% in the same period. This coincided with an increase in taught hours and number of teachers for EBacc subjects such as History and Geography<sup>5</sup>.

The findings of our research evidence this disparity further. Educators reported a decrease in timetabled teaching hours for dance during the lockdown stages of the pandemic, due to reduced access to teaching spaces, reduced curriculum time and/or temporarily cancelled classes. However, despite restrictions easing permanently from late March 2021 onwards, the figures have not 'bounced back' to the number of hours taught pre-pandemic, and instead demonstrate a further reduction in timetabled teaching hours for dance in September 2021 onwards. The aftermath of the pandemic, with a focus on students 'catching up' seems to have provided a smokescreen for schools to further reduce provision of dance and other so-called 'low priority' subjects. Pre-pandemic, the highest percentage of educators had 11- 16 hours of timetabled dance teaching per week (23%). Post-pandemic, the highest percentage of educators now have 6 – 10 hours of timetabled dance teaching per week (19%). This equates to the average number of curriculum dance teaching hours on educators' weekly timetables dropping from 13.5 hours (pre-pandemic) to 11.7 (September 2021).



Some of the more alarming data evidences a reduction in staffing for dance, not only during the pandemic but as long-term or even permanent cuts. A third of survey respondents stated a reduction in staffing during the pandemic in their school or college, citing reasons including lessons temporarily being cancelled or timetable changes being made to focus on the 'catch up' of other subjects. Within this third of respondents, a staggering 76% identified long-term or permanent cuts caused by dance curriculum hours being reduced, or redundancy and restructuring processes.

It is clear that in the midst of the pandemic, schools were placed in the challenging and unprecedented position of needing to make decisions on changing curriculum delivery and staffing depending on what they felt they could achieve whilst the students were learning from home, and what they felt they needed to prioritise. It is understandable that there were many different approaches to this – decision making in a global pandemic is not something anyone was prepared for. What is harder to understand, and baffling when the data is reviewed, is that dance teaching staff have lost hours, or even roles, because of this despite schools being able to return to 'normal' delivery from September 2021 and students being in desperate need of activities that support their mental and physical health which promote enjoyment and social activity.

The data clearly demonstrates that since the beginning of the pandemic, there is less dance being taught in schools, meaning fewer children and young people can access high-quality dance. As outlined at the beginning of this report, dance in schools was already in a vulnerable position pre-pandemic, with the pandemic creating the conditions for dance to be eroded further.

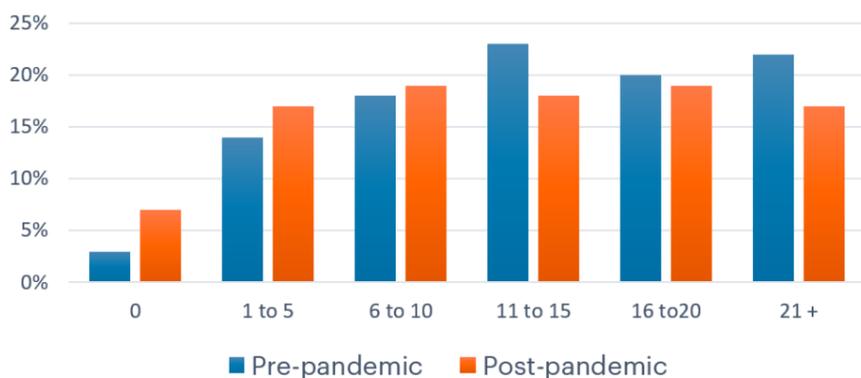
**DANCE IS AT SEVERE RISK OF BECOMING THE PRIVILEGE OF THE ELITE.**

If children and young people cannot access high-quality dance as part of their state education, and the other options of community dance and dance lessons in the private sector usually come with a cost implication, then there is a very real danger of some young people without the means to pay for this falling through the cracks. As stated in the Cultural Learning Alliance briefing paper 'The Arts for Every Child'<sup>20</sup>, "Access to the arts is access to our national life, and it is a social justice issue."

**"Head teachers are removing it from the curriculum at every opportunity! It's a shame they have no foresight beyond core subjects and exam results and don't understand its value."**



Number of timetable teaching hours per week



**"More and more schools are cutting dance provision. By the time they realise its importance, it may not exist within mainstream education."**

## 3.3 EXTRA-CURRICULAR DANCE & TALENT DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Extra-curricular dance (meaning dance that occurs outside of timetabled dance lessons) is often considered by teaching staff as essential to the growth of dance in schools. It is often used to 'hook' students into the subject, to explore styles beyond the requirements of curricula and qualifications, and to provide performance opportunities and workshop experiences at a whole-school level. It is an effective way to celebrate and showcase through age or style specific clubs, performing opportunities in dance companies, intensive days with external practitioners and/or dance companies, and rehearsing for performances. In many schools, it is used as an opportunity to provide a talent development programme through 'stretching and challenging' the most able students. This is vital, as many children and young people face financial or other barriers to accessing out of school provision and without these extra-curricular opportunities in school they will not have the chance to develop their talent and flourish. Beyond this, being able to provide opportunities such as taking students to a live performance or collaborating with other schools in a local venue to showcase work is often the highlight of school for many students, and what they go on to remember about their school days later in life.

**"I've been able to offer no clubs, we've seen no performances. We don't even have assembly to give pupils that opportunity to show their work."**



**"We thrive on giving our students the best opportunities, whether that's performance, industry-led workshops or trips."**

The value of extra-curricular dance activities is significant. When schools were closed in March 2020, the repercussions of what this could mean for dance education were felt almost immediately. Despite there being no legal requirement to cancel or reduce extra-curricular activity during periods of lockdown and restrictions, for many it was the first thing to be removed from school and college life, as teaching staff were overwhelmed with 'moving schemes of work online' and the need for risk mitigation such as increased cleaning and ventilation of spaces.

More than half of respondents (57%) said that extra-curricular dance was cancelled at a whole school level during the pandemic, meaning less opportunities for those children and young people who rely on school to provide talent development programmes. The findings also indicate that even now, with restrictions removed, schools are not delivering the same level of extra-curricular dance:

### **PRIMARY SETTINGS:**

The percentage of educators delivering at least 1 hour of extra-curricular dance has **dropped by 12% between March 2020 and September 2021** (74% pre-pandemic – 62% September 2021).

**38% of educators** will not be delivering any extra-curricular dance from September 2021 (26% pre-pandemic).

### **SECONDARY SETTINGS:**

The number of educators unable to offer any extra-curricular dance also increased slightly in secondary settings, **from 5% pre-pandemic to 8% in September 2021**.

**Only 14% of educators** will be offering 7 or more hours of extra-curricular dance from September 2021 (14%), compared to over a fifth (22%) pre-pandemic.

To summarise, this means that there is currently significantly less extra-curricular dance on offer in UK schools and colleges than there was pre-pandemic. Not only does this impact those children and young people who rely on in-school talent development programmes, it also means that less children and young people are accessing high-quality dance provision. It is often these additional extra-curricular opportunities and experiences that shape children and young people, giving them a thirst for knowledge, a drive to learn more, and a motivation to excel. Over time, studies will no doubt capture the lasting effects that the pandemic has had on these factors, however this research shows that nearly half of the respondents (49%) felt their students' engagement was affected by changes due to the pandemic.

This lasting reduction in the amount of extra-curricular dance offered to children and young people in the UK will, we believe, also impact negatively on the wider dance sector, most specifically the freelance dance workforce. Schools often bring in external artists to deliver part or all of their extra-curricular dance provision and enrichment activities, whether this be in the form of weekly clubs, regular intensives, stand-alone projects or one-off workshops. 16% of respondents reported they never engaged visiting artists in their educational setting pre-pandemic and alarmingly this has risen to 30% post-pandemic, indicating a significant decline in work available for freelance artists working in educational settings since March 2020.

Respondents highlighted that extra-curricular dance and enrichment activities are crucial to providing students with unique and exciting opportunities, building uptake in dance qualifications and enhancing the progress students make. These findings suggest less children and young people in the UK will be offered dance as an extra-curricular activity, or that provision has severely depleted, causing further uncertainty around the position of dance in schools and its future. In March 2020, almost one in three children and young people (4.3 million) were living in poverty in the UK<sup>21</sup>. For many whose schools do not offer dance as part of the curriculum, the decision not to offer extra-curricular dance will mean the only way of accessing dance is through the private and community dance sector, which usually requires a financial commitment. This directly impacts those students from less affluent backgrounds, or who live in areas where 'in-school' dance provision is sparse. These hard-hitting changes are happening at a time when enjoyment, expression and escapism are needed more than ever to help us as a nation recover from the global pandemic, three key factors which have long been associated with the act of doing, creating and/or observing the arts<sup>22, 23, 24</sup>.

**"No activity could run for the whole year not even after school dance. I am concerned about losing numbers and building momentum again, having to start from scratch."**

# 3.4 PHYSICAL HEALTH

Regular physical activity is a fundamental part of a healthy balanced lifestyle and something that is advocated widely by funded organisations including Sport England and Youth Sport Trust, and through targeted campaigns such as This Girl Can, Sport Relief and We Are Undefeatable. Research has shown that regular physical activity reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke, certain cancers and depression whilst preventing obesity, therefore improving physical health<sup>25</sup>. The benefit of this is twofold: firstly, engaging in regular physical activity helps to increase longevity of life but also, through the reduction of the life-limiting illnesses listed above, reduces the growing financial burden on the NHS.

Using regular physical activity as a means of targeting the growing rates of obesity in the UK is particularly important for children and young people. The UK is in the grip of an obesity epidemic, and the UK-wide statistics for both weight and activity levels paint an alarming picture of the current crisis.



## ENGLAND

- **A third (34%) of all children and young people** in England are classed as obese by the time they leave Year 6 (aged 11) and this figure is projected to increase to 38% by 2024<sup>26</sup>.
- The 2019/20 Active Lives survey<sup>4</sup> found **less than half** (44.9%) of children and young people were achieving the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) guideline of 60+ minutes of exercise per day.
- The same survey reported **almost a third of children and young people** (31.3%) being active for less than 30 minutes each day.

## SCOTLAND

- **30% of all children** were at risk of being obese or overweight in 2019<sup>27</sup>.

## WALES

- **28% of 4-5-year-olds** were reported as obese in 2019.
- In 2019, the 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales' consultation<sup>28</sup> reported that **only 14-17% of 11-16-year-olds** did 60 minutes or more of physical activity per day.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

- **25% of children aged 2-10 years** were classified as obese in 2019/20<sup>29</sup>
- In 2019 **only 13% of children** (aged 10 - 18) meeting the requirement of World Health Organisation guideline of 60 minutes + each day.

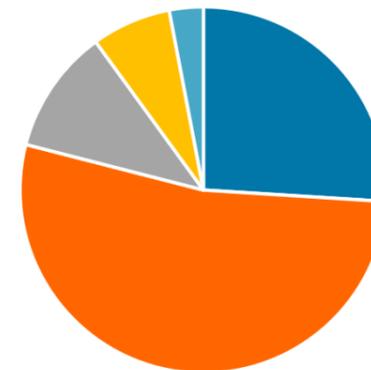
This indicates around 30% of the children and young people in the UK are classified as obese.

Overall, it is clear that even pre-pandemic, many children and young people in the UK were not meeting the CMO's guidance for daily physical activity, and that this is likely to have had a negative impact on their physical health, specifically in terms of their weight.

The pandemic has brought with it an increase in obesity across all age groups due to reduced physical activity. Sport England published 'Active Lives: Children and Young People Survey Coronavirus Report' in January 2021<sup>30</sup>, which demonstrated a decrease in activity levels of 2.3%. Whilst this percentage may seem minimal, it actually equates to just over 100,000 children and young people doing less physical activity. Similarly, research carried out in Scotland found that 50% of children aged 2 to 7 years did less physical activity than usual during the pandemic whereas only 20% did more than they had previously<sup>31</sup>. This demonstrates the necessity to continue tracking activity levels as we recover from the pandemic, and to compare the data to future publications on obesity levels to unpick the true impact.



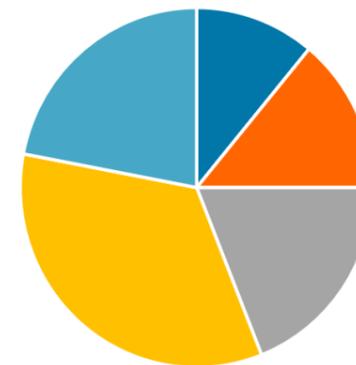
## Student Physical Health



■ Much less fit & healthy ■ A little less fit & healthy ■ Same  
■ A little more fit & healthy ■ Much more fit & healthy

An overwhelming 79% of survey respondents said they had observed a decline in the physical health and fitness of their students, with 53% stating students' physical health was a little worse and 26% significantly worse compared to before the pandemic.

## Staff Physical Health



■ Much less fit & healthy ■ Slightly less fit & healthy ■ Same  
■ A little more fit & healthy ■ Much more fit & healthy

Interestingly, the data was slightly more positive when educators considered changes to their own physical health during the pandemic, with 56% reporting worse physical health (34% little worse, 22% significantly worse) however 25% reporting an improvement.

**“Students found remote learning hard to engage in and their physical fitness (particularly stamina) has suffered.”**



Including dance as part of the curriculum is one way of ensuring students have regular opportunities for physical activity and can maintain good physical health. As well as the physical benefits - reduced BMI, increased cardiovascular fitness and improved bone health<sup>32</sup>, dance is unique in the way it combines technical skills with creativity, artistry, and provides students with a vehicle to express themselves freely, explore the capabilities and strengths of their own body and be autonomous in their learning. Studies confirm that specific groups, such as teenage girls, favour activities including dance that are not classed as a *'team sport'*<sup>38</sup> and do not rely on competition. If there is little or no dance provision on offer, it may also impact the development of key skills as children grow into adolescence. Dr Siobhan Mitchell cites that dancers benefit from improved *'strength, motor skills, and the activation of new motivational tendencies'*<sup>33</sup>. This is why it is essential that every child and young person has access to high-quality dance as part of their education, not only to offer choice, freedom and give every child the opportunity to excel, but to safeguard their physical and mental health.



# 3.5 MENTAL WELLBEING

The fifth and final key finding from the survey relates to mental wellbeing, both of teaching staff and students. The questions in the survey asked educators to comment on their own mental wellbeing, as well as that of their students. For the purpose of this report, mental wellbeing refers to 'subjective wellbeing' - how a person feels from day-to-day and assesses their ability to cope with the demands of daily life. Whilst no direct questions were asked in relation to mental health, such as the absence or presence of signs/symptoms of emotional distress, reference is made here to how dance can positively impact and support good mental health as evidenced by numerous research studies.



**“Student wellbeing and mental health has been a huge issue with regards to managing my job since the pandemic. This was already an issue but has increased significantly.”**

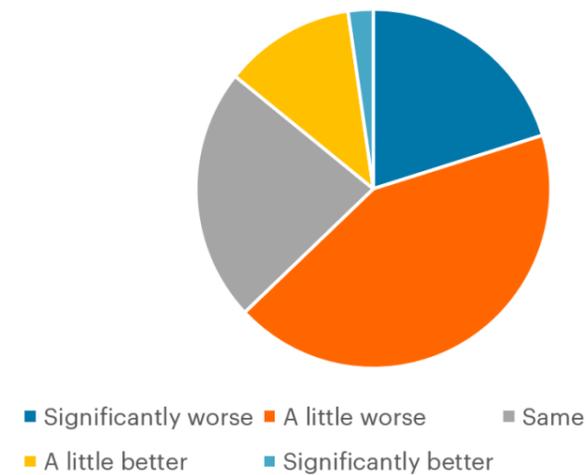
The responses to questions on mental wellbeing for both staff and students paint a very troubling picture and it is essential that the improvement of mental wellbeing should be prioritised during such a uniquely challenging time when no one has prior experience of recovering from a global pandemic, where many have lost loved ones and endured unexpected changes to their lives and future plans. Whilst this research discusses the impact on dance students and teachers' mental wellbeing, and the role dance itself can have in supporting mental health and wellbeing, it is in no way undermining the severity of the situation and the desperate need for different kinds of support (medical, social) to be made widely available.



**“Students are incredibly vulnerable and overwhelmed... they need caring and nurturing, not just to be taught examination stuff. The pressure to catch up is full on and I do not know when teachers/students are expected to do this?”**

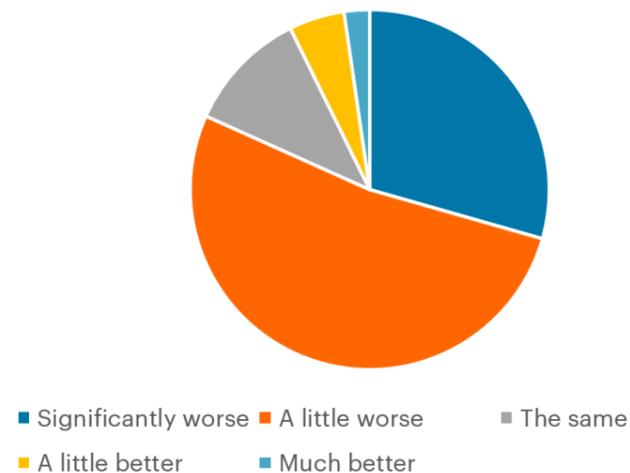


Staff Mental Wellbeing



Many educators identified that the pandemic had impacted negatively upon their mental wellbeing. When reflecting on their own mental wellbeing, almost two thirds (63%) of respondents stated their mental wellbeing had declined. 43% of educators felt their mental wellbeing was 'slightly worse' and 20% felt it was 'significantly worse'.

Student Mental Wellbeing



The most alarming statistic was in relation to how educators viewed the mental wellbeing of their students, with 81% of respondents reporting that their students' mental wellbeing appeared to have declined. Almost a third of respondents (29%) found students' mental wellbeing to be 'significantly worse' (with 52% stating 'slightly worse').

Reflecting on these statistics, it seems obvious that both staff and students need support in safeguarding their mental wellbeing. In addition to the impact of the pandemic itself, mental wellbeing has no doubt been challenged further by the requirement to complete a myriad of school-based assessments to provide teacher-assessed grades (TAGs) which were ultimately responsible for students' future study and career choices.

As with physical health, dance can be used as a powerful tool to support both positive mental wellbeing and mental health. The Mental Health Foundation states that the negative effects of the pandemic on mental health are likely to last much longer than those that impact on physical health and have called for a National COVID-19 Mental Health Response and Recovery Plan. At this time, when we have a national mental health crisis, we believe there should be a national focus on ensuring activities like dance, that have been found to significantly reduce the risk of depression by as much as 30%<sup>13</sup>, are embraced, valued and incorporated wherever possible as an effective means of recovery.

**“As a freelancer before the pandemic I was overwhelmed by the amount of work and dance I had to do and deliver. Thanks to the pandemic I had time to develop my own practice and acknowledge my priorities, including my wellbeing.”**

In addition to the associated mental health benefits, dance also boosts feelings of happiness, confidence and self-esteem which contribute to positive mental wellbeing. Put simply, dancing makes people happy! It is a joyous, expressive art form that requires no equipment, other than the human body. There is a vast body of research to support the positive impact dance can have on mental wellbeing.

Aside from the pandemic, there is a school of thought that suggests dance could be used, alongside other activities, as *'prevention rather than cure'* for poor mental health and wellbeing. Since early 2019, GPs have been able to 'socially prescribe' dance on the NHS to deal with conditions such as dementia, loneliness, anxiety and depression. This means that instead of prescribing medicines, which hold greater cost implications, social activities can be used to treat these conditions, with many finding this more effective than traditional medication. If high-quality dance were to be accessible to all children and young people, for some this would likely act as prevention against poor mental health.



**Physical self-worth scores for girls who took part in dance activity as an intervention improved significantly when compared with other P.E. activities<sup>32</sup>.**

**The very act of making art (visual or performance) develops a young person's sense of identity and self-efficacy and increases resilience, all key components of good mental health<sup>23</sup>.**

**Participating in cultural or creative activities means you are more likely to report good health. 62% of participants who engaged in dance for this study were more likely to report good health<sup>24</sup>.**

**Feelings of depression have been found to reduce for participants who engage in dance-based interventions<sup>7, 34</sup>.**

**Dance can make a positive impact on health, wellbeing and future aspirations<sup>35</sup>.**



**“It is amazing to see how students have flourished again now they are back to face to face teaching.”**

On top of the physical and mental health benefits that come from physically participating in and watching dance, engaging in this art form also provides an opportunity for the development of social skills, which are vital in a young person's development and contribute to positive mental wellbeing. Whether participating in dance in school or out of school, for fun, or with a specific *'end-goal'* in mind, children and young people establish friendships, trust, and a sense of community. The very nature of creating dance revolves around collaboration – sharing ideas, observing, discussing, trying, refining, providing feedback, evaluating, supporting. Maintaining a place for dance in education provides a unique opportunity to work together in different ways and in different roles, as choreographers, teachers, performers, observers and critics.

# 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations from our research are two-fold: in relation to the current situation in schools as we as a nation recover from the COVID-19 pandemic; and to address the ongoing longer-term decline of dance in schools. One Dance UK have collated a series of recommendations to ensure the future of dance teaching is secure and of high quality in all schools.

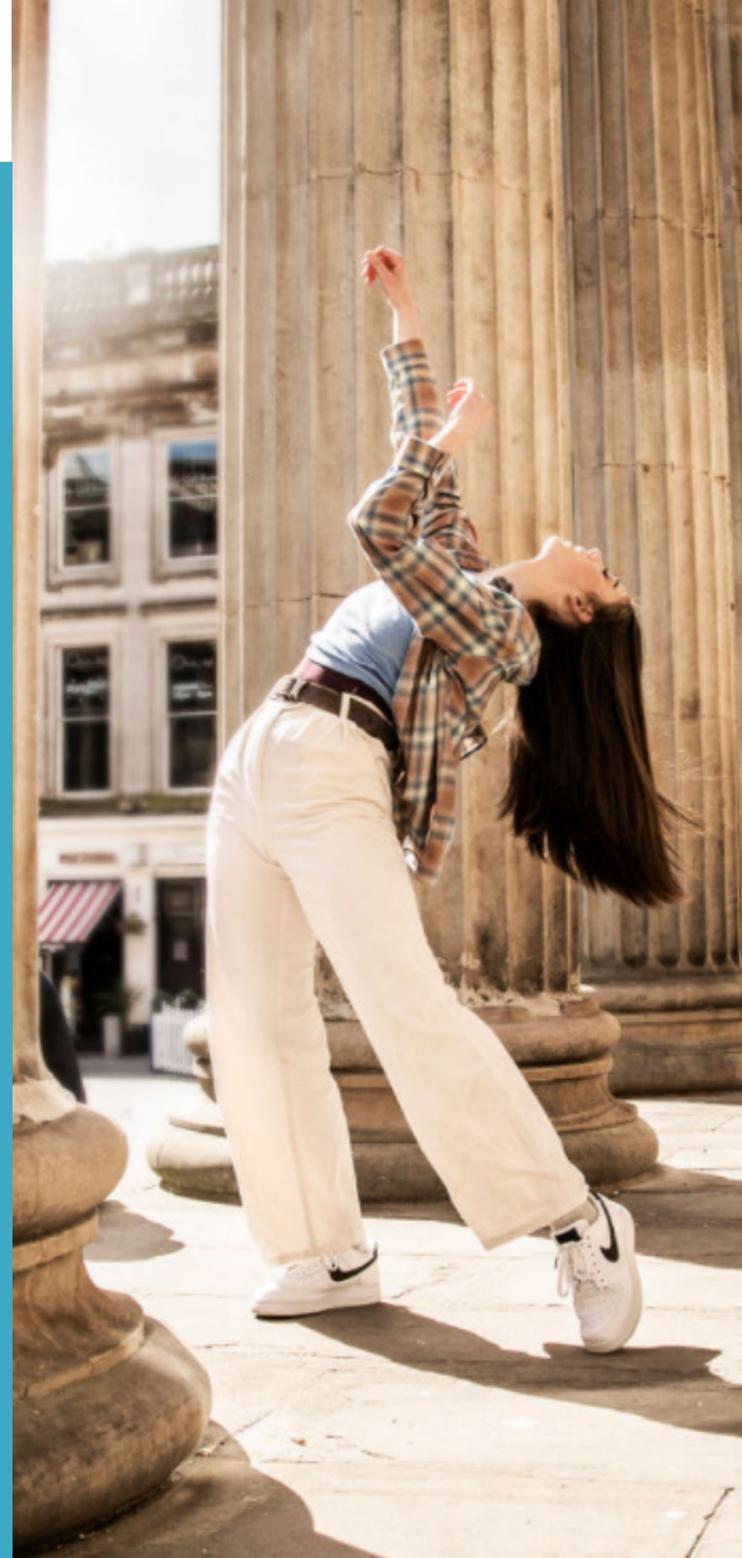


## Based on the findings of our research, One Dance UK calls on the UK Government and devolved administrations to:

- Demonstrate support for dance in public discussions and develop an understanding of the value of dance in education. Dance and other arts subjects should no longer be referred to by politicians in the media as 'low-value', 'non-priority', 'dead-end' or 'Mickey Mouse subjects'. The Government and educational bodies must be mindful of the language used and avoid bias towards some subjects/sectors that they believe to be more important, as this not only impacts the decisions of our children and young people but also skews society's view of individuals working in these areas.
- Commit to securing the place of dance in the curriculum. A subject that can positively impact the ongoing obesity and mental health crises in the UK deserves to be an integral part of each child's curriculum.
- Abandon the EBacc accountability measure and remove the narrow focus on STEM subjects - strategies that direct students towards 'academic' subjects. Every child and young person is different, with varying interests, passions, and strengths. They should be able to make informed decisions when selecting their qualification subjects, without fear that this may later impact their employability or perceived 'worth' as an individual. With the growth of the Creative Industries and their valuable contribution to UK economy, the importance of developing creative skills should be made evident to children and young people, as they will form the future workforce.
- Strengthen investment in means-tested out of school talent development programmes, for example the National Youth Dance Company and Centres for Advanced Training (CAT), to support and enhance the schools offer.

## More specifically, One Dance UK calls on educational bodies, exam boards and other educational institutions to:

- Identify geographic regions with low uptake of qualifications and examine why this is the case. We ask Ofqual and exam boards to work collaboratively to address this inequality of opportunity with the support of One Dance UK.



**"I think there is a lot of miseducation/understanding about the value of dance and the arts, how academic the courses actually are, and the plethora of arts-based careers that are available in the industry and in academia."**

## We call upon Multi Academy Trusts (MAT), local authorities and school leaders to:

- Review their dance provision and ensure they have a high-quality dance offer for every student in their school, in line with education and training inspectorates' expectations. In England, Ofsted expect to see a 'broad and balanced curriculum', and similarly Eystn's Welsh Inspection framework observes whether the curriculum 'provides pupils with a suitable breadth and depth of learning experiences across all disciplines and areas of learning and experience to develop their interests and wider skills.' In Scotland, Education Scotland inspections outline the need for opportunities for personal achievement within the curriculum, and in Northern Ireland the ETI (Education Training Inspectorate) also calls for students to have access to 'broad, balanced and flexible academic and vocational options matched well to their needs and interests'.
- Advocate for the inclusion of dance at MAT and senior leadership level. Use information and resources available to inform key decision makers of the importance of dance, specifically in relation to addressing the current obesity and mental health crisis, embedding cross-curricular learning, and enabling every child to excel.
- Utilise partnerships to expand dance provision and access expertise in a cost-effective manner. Partnerships may be developed with professional dance organisations, companies, artists, community organisations, other schools and FE and HE organisations.

*High-quality dance provision may be achieved through investing in high quality CPD, sharing good practice, creating new schemes and units of work, working with local dance artists and dance companies, and seeking support from One Dance UK. Schools should consider the most cost-effective and sustainable approaches to CPD. For instance, it may be better for dance specialists to deliver training that supports teachers to effectively plan and deliver their own dance curriculum, rather than buying in resources and lesson plans. Whilst one-off events and specialist interventions can be beneficial, they may not deliver sustained improvement.*

# ONE DANCE UK: OUR PROMISE

Now more than ever, it is vital that the dance sector comes together as one strong voice, advocating for the importance of dance in education and in people's lives. One Dance UK is working to lead the way to a stronger, more vibrant and diverse dance sector and we continue to advocate for dance education relaying information to Government directly and via the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dance, providing the secretariat for the Children and Young People's Dance Programme Board, being part of the Council for Subject Associations and attending regular meetings with DanceHE, Sport England, Dance Learning & Participation Network and others, and delivering advocacy-based CPD to teachers in schools and grass-roots settings.



As the Sector Support Organisation for Dance and Subject Association for dance in schools, One Dance UK promises to:

- Provide a range of dance education CPD opportunities that are high-quality, accessible and low in cost. High-quality dance provision relies on teachers having the skills and knowledge to deliver dance confidently. We will continue to seek new ways to engage and deliver to schools, in addition to our bespoke CPD sessions, *Ready, Step, Teach!* and *Take the Leap!* CPD programmes and educational resources.
- Advocate for the place of dance in the curriculum at every level, attending and contributing to the APPG for Dance meetings, working alongside key organisations including Sport England, the Children & Young People's Programme Board and DanceHE to improve provision and uptake, and at grass-roots level delivering advocacy-based CPD and creating free resources to promote dance as part of the curriculum.
- Deliver focused campaigns to alert the nation to the vulnerable position of dance in education and suggest effective ways to those who care to take action.
- Continue to share best practice, educational developments and updates, and information on dance-based qualifications from a neutral standpoint.

**"Arts education  
is a means  
of quality  
education."**



**We believe that everyone has the power to influence others on the importance of access to dance for all children and young people! You can advocate for dance in education by:**

- Writing to your local MP to draw their attention to the vulnerable position of dance within education. You could share our report with them, invite them to attend forth-coming APPG meetings or simply outline why dance plays an important and powerful role in the lives of children and young people. If you are not sure who your MP is, you can find out here: [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)
- Downloading and sharing our recently updated resource '[Dance: A guide for governing bodies](#)', created in partnership with Arts Council England and the National Governance Association
- Sharing our advocacy documents with your peers/staff/colleagues or wider community. These documents include our brand new 'Why Study Dance at Key Stage 4' resource, our updated Careers Guide, and our brand new 'Case Studies in Dance' resource. All of these resources and many more can be found on the [One Dance UK website](#).
- Becoming a member of One Dance UK to amplify your voice. Together we are stronger. We offer a range of memberships, each with a range of amazing benefits to support you!
- Following us on social media to stay up to date with our advocacy work - @onedanceuk



## 5. CLOSING REMARKS – THE FUTURE OF DANCE IN EDUCATION

Despite evidencing the plethora of benefits that come from studying dance as a child, we are still faced with a crisis that could lead to dance being pushed out of education or becoming even more of a 'postcode lottery' where accessing high-quality dance as a young person is dependent on where you live and the school you attend. One Dance UK urge that the issues and recommendations presented are considered with a sense of urgency and importance, and that concrete actions are put in place immediately to safeguard against the further marginalisation or loss of dance education in schools. Educators are continuing to find teaching dance more difficult, with almost two thirds (62%) reporting teaching has become more difficult since the start of their career, or over the last ten years. Educators share our grave concerns about the apparent de-prioritisation of dance.

Whilst this research is centred on the place of dance in education, we must also remark on the current priorities in wider education and the impact we believe this will have on the UK.

Dance is far from the only subject facing hurdles caused by funding cuts, shifting Government priorities and a worldwide pandemic. In December 2020, the Incorporated Society of Musicians published their report into the impact of COVID-19 'The Heart of the School is Missing'<sup>36</sup> and shared not only the day-to-day changes that occurred as a result of the pandemic, but also the challenges music education continues to face and their concerns for the future of education. Many of the fears for music mirror those outlined for dance.

2021 saw two huge setbacks to several subjects – the announcement of cuts to funding for many courses including dance at HE level, and the decision to move forward with the creation of T-Levels to replace many vocational courses at Level 3. Whilst the initial documentation suggests some Level 3 Performing Arts courses will retain funding, it is unclear which courses this will be. Over and above this, the fact that Performing Arts were not considered for a T-level is perhaps the most bizarre factor and demonstrates a perceived lack of value amongst key decision makers and stakeholders with this subject area. Furthermore, at the time of publication the UK Government are conducting a market review of all Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses, causing uncertainty for the future of Teacher Training across all subjects, particularly dance, as there are already very few training providers in existence. We are concerned for the future impact this may have not only on teacher training, but on the recruitment of quality teachers.

It is widely reported that the creative industries consistently bring economic growth to the UK. Prior to the pandemic, jobs in the UK's Creative Industries were growing at four times the UK average and one million people were employed in these sectors. New data published by the Creative Industries Federation in July 2021 demonstrates that Creative Industries are a catalyst for post-pandemic recovery and have the potential to create 300,000 new jobs and generate an extra £28bn for the economy by 2025<sup>17</sup>. The Creative Industries Council (CIC) also reports that the UK accounts for more than £45bn per annum in creative exports. Yet the current policy focus is on STEM subjects, with creative subjects being reduced and marginalised at every turn. Considering the data, a different approach is needed, one that encourages the study of both STEM and creative subjects, to ensure the UK has a future generation that can fulfil the rapidly expanding workforce needs of the creative industries. Our calls to action are not to suggest that dance is more important than other subjects, only that it should be treated equally and with the respect it deserves. Our society is rich and diverse because every person is different and so should have the opportunity to excel and thrive in whatever subjects they choose, wherever they live and whichever educational institution they attend.

Over the last 18 months, through periods of total lockdown, the nation turned to various support mechanisms to maintain their physical and mental health. Many of these mechanisms were already embedded in the arts, movement and creativity, observing or engaging in streamed performances, participating in digital exercise initiatives and turning to music or movement as a means of escape. As we emerge from the pandemic with a renewed sense of what is important, what makes us feel good, and what we each turn to in our darkest hour, this could be a time to reinvent the education system, turning away from the concept of only learning something to be tested on it, and instead having a child-centred approach that enables the younger generations to flourish, with the value of good mental and physical health placed at the forefront of the curriculum. This would seem even more pertinent given that dance and other art forms are now socially prescribed on the NHS to combat mental health issues such as loneliness, depression and anxiety.

The world has been given an unexpected opportunity to pause, reflect and assess the way we work and exist – now is the time to implement change, to ensure that in ten years' time another report is not written evidencing how dance and other subjects have declined further, or even ceased to exist. We know what is needed – a high quality, broad and balanced curriculum with a focus on improving mental and physical health. Valuing dance as an integral part of the curriculum and ensuring every child can access dance both inside and outside of school would no doubt go a long way to achieving this.

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**“Until the Government recognises the value/ benefits of dance education as an art form/ expressive/ creative subject in the same way as music, there will be a constant battle for institutions to provide inclusive and accessible course for all students interested in dance. I have witnessed a range of institutions thrive but also decline due to pressures from the management of institutions, external financial factors and de-valuing the arts within education.”**



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