

## I. Introduction – National Dance Company Wales

Dance is a **social and physical activity**: when dancers meet in the studio, they get close, they touch, they lift, they sweat. Audiences want to witness dancers working together to create great moments of emotional impact and union, often close up. Participants want the **exhilaration of working together** in proximity in a studio or their town hall, meeting and dancing in unison in their communities.

All of this has been altered by Covid-19. The loss of these deep and powerful experiences is profound for all those who enjoy dance or dancing. Black Lives Matter and #WeShallNotbeRemoved have, at the same time, highlighted the lack of equity for many in Welsh society. Freelancers in the arts lost their livelihoods. Covid-19 affected those most vulnerable to economic, medical and social change.

Fulfilling our unique responsibility as the national company for dance, at NDCWales **we aim produce great work** that compares with the world's finest, acting as a strong advocate for dance and the arts in Wales. In doing that **we show the world what modern Wales is** – a nation of cultural excellence and diversity as we innovate to push the boundaries of what can be imagined on stages across the world.

In Wales we **open up opportunities for people** to express their lives and values through dance, with societal and health benefits for mind and body growing a **happier, healthier nation for future generations**. In order to achieve this, we work in every corner of Wales, from small towns to the cities, working flexibly with partners in their communities to **bring dance to people in their own places** across the nation.

As a Company which earns income from touring extensively in Europe, the shift in relationships with partners in **EU countries through Brexit** is profound. Some EU countries are less willing to book a UK-based company, it takes longer to plan and administer our tours, and there are substantial additional costs.

For all these reasons, we recognise this is an **exciting and much-needed moment for change**, to rethink how the cultural world acts and operates with and for Wales. We also need to build in a permanent adaptability to the environment as the world changes and play our part in response to the climate emergency.

## 2. What is the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your sector, and what further support is needed from the Welsh and UK Governments both to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and enable the post-pandemic recovery?

- a) The loss of work for freelancers, especially in dance. Many freelancers in the arts – and especially in dance – have seen their livelihoods crumble in the pandemic, and many are leaving the industry. This will inevitably weaken and impoverish the sector as talent and

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creativity drain away from Wales, and from the sector generally. Freelancers need further support to maintain the viability of being a creative freelancer in Wales.

- b) Financial: the finances of many arts organisations, including producing companies like NDCWales, have been, and continue to be, severely affected by the pandemic. We've increased our earned and fundraised income very substantially over the past 5 years to become less dependent on ACW core funding (now around 57%), but because we employ eight full-time dancers as staff as opposed to hiring freelancers for each project, our fixed costs are relatively high. We have seen a drop in our reserves, mostly due to the immediate and unrecoverable losses sustained in the final half of March 2020 – one of our most productive times of the year. Cultural Recovery monies and furlough have helped mitigate some of the losses 'in year', but earning potential remains limited with curtailment of international work, and a venue network reluctant to make programming/financial commitments for the future. Companies' potential to earn money from commercial hires of our spaces is close to zero. It is not at all certain that next financial year (2022/23) will be any less difficult in trading terms.

This leaves many arts organisations with depleted reserves and in a financially precarious position. Most companies have kept all staff employed over the past year but with the end of furlough and diminished earning potential this is tough. We don't expect a return to full earning potential to happen at any time, because, in light of the last year's experiences, we want to make changes to our work – to spend a greater amount of our time embedded in communities to help the healing process after Covid, working with a wider range of freelancers and addressing the challenges of the climate emergency. All these aspirations mean new business models and, in the short term, reduced earning potential. It's a perfect storm.

- c) Cultural Recovery Funds (CRF)

The CRF support offered has been essential to the survival of many arts organisations and the communities they've continued to serve. But the need for investment of this kind continues, for the reasons outlined above: earning and fundraising potential have not returned to their former levels and are not likely to do so for some months, maybe longer.

Further rounds of Cultural Recovery may be required to sustain organisations through the next year to 18 months. The second round of CRF was not open to organisations, like us, whose core ACW grant represents more than an average of 55% of turnover over the years 2016-2019. This is understandable but does not take into account that producing companies who employ permanent artists as performers have business models with a large proportion of fixed costs. This is a different model to that of most venues, for instance. We will need new business models for the future, but those take time to implement.

- d) Digital working

Nothing can replace the communal experience of being in a theatre space or at a festival when you are part of a live, shared artistic experience. For most of the past 18 months that has been impossible, and many have found ways of working digitally that cannot replicate live work but can retain connection with audiences and participants and reach new people not only in Wales, but around the world. We've had over 900,000 views of the work in a year,

which is a **three-fold increase on previous levels of digital engagement**. We'd like to maintain connection with those audiences.

The audience for digital work is younger, more diverse and, whilst there is a strong core audience in Wales, it is also a world-wide audience. We and many companies like us will wish to continue connecting with them and sharing our artform.

3. What issues should the committee prioritise in planning our work programme for the immediate and longer term?

- a) Black Lives Matter and #WeShallNotBeRemoved and the effects of the pandemic on the most marginalised in society are a clarion call for change to achieve equity, inclusion and greater diversity in the sector. This is needed across protected characteristics, but is especially in relation to Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse people; d/Deaf and disabled people; LGBTQ+ people, and those from low-income backgrounds. The scope of any work needs to consider how artists are engaged, audiences and participant development strategies and ability to consult/research need, and governance structures. It will require examination of the nature of and access to arts training, recruitment and employment culture and the approaches that arts organisations are taking to audience engagement.
- b) Improving working conditions for freelancers and how we can move away from a position of precarity, to better support their central role in the cultural life of Wales.
- c) Supporting organisations to build financial stability: in the light of the twin effects of the pandemic and Brexit, organisations need space and expertise to develop and implement new business models and ways of working. We need collective action and exchange of expertise and knowledge to enable the arts to deliver on the need to better embed itself in communities, create work which is accessible and engaging for people who don't currently take part, to reflect modern Wales.
- d) Artist mobility: both the pandemic and Brexit are affecting artists' ability to travel both within nations and between nations, meaning that our cultural life is not currently enriched by the experience and knowledge that working with people from a range of different backgrounds brings
- e) The dance sector is precarious and small in Wales, and is dependent on few portfolio clients, and the dedication and persistence of a small number of project-funded companies and independent artists. There is an opportunity for collective action to provide a better infrastructure to develop and tour dance work and to develop new audiences, learning from our experiences in the past year.

**4. How does Brexit and the new UK-EU relationship affect you or your organisation? What support have you received to respond to the changes? What further support, if any, is needed from Welsh and UK Governments?**

In a time of increasing international tension and insularity, we reflect modern Wales we would want it to be. We're an open and inclusive company of people from **many nations and backgrounds**, working with Welsh people and communities in Wales and looking outwards, representing Wales's values of openness and tolerance overseas.

Before the pandemic, NDCWales frequently worked internationally, **representing Wales as a modern cultural nation and forging international links** with artists, communities and audiences. In 2019/20 alone the Company gave 19 performances outside the UK – in Austria, Germany, Hong Kong, Spain and Japan.

- a) When Wales' arts companies work internationally, by collaborating with others, or in taking their work overseas, they can represent Wales and form a powerful sense of a modern nation, communicating our values as a place where culture matters, and where we seek to engage with people beyond its borders. The increased costs and complexity of working in Europe will inevitably diminish the ability to represent Wales in this way, as organisations make choices to avoid countries where there are added barriers to working. The impact of Wales' standing and reputation will decline as we become less visible and present within the EU.
- b) Having lost significant international income as a result of the pandemic, organisations like NDCWales are expecting to lose further income due to Brexit. There is greater reluctance on the part of EU-based promoters to book UK-based companies, and our costs for are higher due the added costs of touring. These costs relate to work permit requirements in some countries for certain types of arts workers; the new haulage or 'cabotage' rules and costs, and the need for additional time to travel via ports.
- c) Dance – and other types of companies – have international companies of artists at their heart. NDCWales has been proudly internationalist in its search for talent, having had, over the past five years, dancers from Wales, France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the USA and Singapore, with choreographers from Wales, Spain, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Belgium and the USA. We are already seen a fall in EU-based dancers applying for roles with us, and we expect this decline to continue. We're determined to maintain an international company, as we know that the most interesting work is created by companies when the diverse and varied experience of multiple nations comes together in a meeting of talent and different dance cultures. That is part of our reputation, and why we are successful in securing international touring and collaborations.
- d) As we navigate the shift in international relationships, and adopt ways of working which take into account the demands of the climate emergency, collective learning and sharing of knowledge and experience would be especially useful both within the sector and beyond, where there are many industries working out how to work more effectively post-Brexit. Investment in knowledge and expertise would be especially helpful, so that we

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have local centres of expertise to call on, with transitional support for those who work in  
the EU whilst we adapt to the higher costs associated with this activity.

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