

# Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

## Response from National Dance Company Wales

This report addresses the range of Social Contract activities National Dance Company Wales provides in Wales, including participation activities, the demographic groups we work with and the possible impact of budget cuts on this work. We hope this enables the Communities Equality Committee to identify gaps in dance participation due to Government budget cuts.

A fundamental element of NDCWales' work is to 'engage and excite people through dance'. We nurture and develop dance for all ages and at all levels of experience. We seek to inspire people from beginners to professionals, to develop an explorative mindset and a love for the discovery of dance.

We are an inclusive, welcoming and open organisation that encourages dialogue and a free exchange of ideas. We engage with people from all walks of life breaking down preconceptions and barriers between artist and audience. We believe in inspirational experiences for everyone, including those less able, through performance, participation and partnership.

Explore Dance is a fundamental strand of the Company's operation. It aims to create and nurtures Wales' love of dance through participation. The Company strategically provides access points from the earliest stages of a dancer's development to the highest levels of achievement in the art form.

We maintain strong roots in our touring base through our long standing commitment to school and community work, through our touring residencies across Wales and our well developed workshop provision. When on tour we deliver workshops to a range of groups including schools, colleges, universities, community dance groups and private dance schools who then come and see a performance as part of the workshop deal.

In addition to our participation work on tour, we continue to deliver our Future Dance Cardiff programme with A2: Arts Active in providing three courses; Associates, a year round training programme for young aspiring dancers who are looking to pursue a career in dance; Springboard, a three day course at the Dance House in the Easter holidays taught by NDCWales dancers and summerdance, an intensive week at the Dance House during the

summer holidays which culminates in a performance at either St David's Hall or the New Theatre.

The most significant demographic group we target with our participation work is young dancers between the broad age range of 9 – 24 years. However, this can be split into smaller categories of 9 - 12 years, 13 – 16 years and 17 – 24 years.

Whilst on tour we hold our popular Interactive Matinees specifically designed for the 9 - 12 age group in venues around Wales including Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon and Theatr Hafren, Newtown. These matinee performances are ideal for primary school groups and schools for children with special educational needs as they enable the young audience members to join our dancers on stage, ask questions and watch a suitable fully lit and costumed work. For the 9 – 12 age group we also offer Jumpstart, a day course at the Dance House lead by Company dancers. Jumpstart is an opportunity for novice dancers to have their first contact with NDCWales and a fun introduction to contemporary dance.

The workshop programme we offer whilst on tour targets the demographic group of young people age 14 – 24. Our workshops & Interactive Matinees are at risk with cuts to education budgets.

Cuts to schools arts budgets in favour of 'core' subjects or simply cutting dance as an option from the curriculum has made even the most supportive and keen teachers of dance turn down opportunities in their area, making it increasingly harder to engage with the communities we visit on tour. Recent responses from high school teachers have included:

*"I am sorry, my school have taken dance out of their options. I would have loved to work with you again, but am now teaching Theatre Studies."*

*"This sounds great. However, there is no way that the school would be able to fund it!"*

We make contact with both private & voluntary organisations whilst on tour. The uptake from these groups is dependant on 2 factors; the public funding available to voluntary organisations and schools which enable them to subsidise a workshop, and, if the prior is not possible, the ability of individual members of organisations to pay for themselves to take part. In some areas we visit on tour the level of deprivation has a negative impact on uptake. The price of the deal we offer is set by the hosting venue and is based on the areas socio-economic profile

The numbers applying for our Springboard, summerdance and Associates has stayed consistent in recent years. Future Dance Cardiff is made possible through a well established partnership with A2: Arts Active, a Cardiff City Council initiative that runs in conjunction with St David's Hall and the New Theatre to offer a wide variety of education, community and

audience engagement activities. The running of these projects draws from three income streams NDCWales, A2: Arts Active and the participant fees. The continuation of Future Dance Cardiff is dependent on 2 factors: continuing support from Cardiff City Council and monetary input from the participants. If either were to be withdrawn or reduced the future of Future Dance Cardiff would be at jeopardy.

As a National performing company we aim to raise aspirations and equality of access for young people. In our view finance should not be a bar to young people who wish to develop their skills in dance. For those who wish to dance with us but cannot afford the fees, bursaries are offered across all projects. The availability of bursaries and how to access them is made clear to all potential participants on our website, print and application forms. Applications are assessed on a case by case and confidential basis and appropriate solutions put forward. Criteria have been established including free school meals and transport costs. NDCWales will continue to offer the bursaries from its own resources. This however, is reliant on full capacity of courses being reached and the cost not being a limiting factor for the majority applying.

In addition to our core Explore Dance activities, we have a number of stand alone participation projects. One of our current projects, Dancing Parallel, is a creative performance project for young people inspired by Dance GB and reflects the core values of the Cultural Olympiad which are sharing, understanding, respect, generating a positive legacy, inspiring and involving young people, and celebrating the UK. We had specific recruitment aims to involve young people aged 14 - 18 who had no previous involvement with NDCWales, who are from less advantaged backgrounds and are currently involved in other dance forms. Bursaries have been offered to the participants of Dancing Parallel.

The project is enabled through partnerships with Wales Millennium Centre, Rubicon Dance and A2: Arts Active and is also part funded from these sources. At present this involves an ongoing active search by NDCWales for private sponsorship, participants have been asked for a token contribution of £70 and finally the participants themselves are encouraged to be involved in the fundraising. This encourages an understanding of the realities of arts participation and conveys a key message to the participants that ownership of a project such as this is divided among many partners including the participants, local organisations, private sponsorship. At the present time with funding secure from Wales Millennium Centre and A2: Arts Active our focus is to identify a number of private sponsors; this work is still in progress.

Our participation work extends beyond only offering opportunities for people who want to dance. We hold Open Class at the Dance House and whilst on tour across Wales. Adult artists and photographers are the main demographic target for this opportunity but we also welcome interested people who simply want to watch our dancers in action. This opportunity

is free for ticket holders. This opportunity is a valuable asset and has real financial value. In a period of austerity in which there is potential for funding to be cut to NDCWales, it may have to be reviewed as a potential energy stream.