

April 2010

Joining up the dots: Dance agencies – thoughts on future direction

A companion report to Dance Mapping: a window on dance

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Aims and methodology

A dance agency is the broad term used to describe dance organisations involved in dance development activity. This includes artform development, advocacy, participation, audience development and infrastructure development across a local area, region and in some instances, nationally. At present agencies are generally known as regional or national dance agencies, or national strategic organisations.

The aims of this paper are:

- To consider the portfolio of dance agencies currently funded by Arts Council England in relation to the Arts Council's general policy and strategy
- To offer some ideas for discussion with the dance sector, on how we might move forward with future agency provision across the English regions in the context of the Arts Council's developing 10 year framework, Achieving great art for everyone.

This report accompanies the report *Dance mapping: a window on dance* (www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-work/dance-mapping), published in 2009 and will inform the Arts Council's 10-year framework for the arts. It will contribute towards building a case for the arts as part of the new investment phase. It is hoped it will offer a useful set of ideas/concepts for dance agencies in planning their own strategies and development.

The paper is primarily drawn from discussions that took place in 2008–2009 with both agencies and artists engaging with the agency network (see Appendix 3 for a detailed account of the discussion).

The analysis focuses on organisations primarily set up as agencies. It recognises the plurality of their roles which include a range of dance development and increasingly from some, production and presentation. The report does not cover venues, although it acknowledges the important development work carried out by dance house spaces, which provide dance-specific production and performance facilities. It reflects on progress that has been made and outlines some of the challenges that agencies are facing. It offers ideas to stimulate future development, through further discussion between agencies, the Arts Council and other key stakeholders. These include clarification around definitions for agencies including those based in buildings.

An accompanying paper will be produced to inform Arts Council investment planning, offering a deeper analysis of business models for agencies based in buildings. This will be shared with the agencies involved, but will not be made public for reasons of commercial sensitivity and data protection. Alongside this a separate paper will be produced, reflecting on how non building based agencies partner with building based organisations to facilitate and promote their activity.

Methodology

The brief for this work was discussed by agencies and the Arts Council's Dance Practice Group (dance officers and others working with dance within Arts Council England) and the Arts Directors' Group. Regional dance officers produced summary documents outlining the remits of agencies in their respective regions.

Workshops were held with agencies over 18 months to respond to the questions outlined in the brief and inform the first section of this report. Regional dance officers attended some of these meetings. Detailed notes from each of the consultation stages are summarised as appendices to this document.

While this report has been being worked on, the Arts Council has developed its draft ten-year strategic framework, Achieving great art for everyone, which at the time of writing is in consultation phase. The consultation document, available on the Arts Council's website, (www.artscouncil.org.uk/ourconsultation) analyses the challenges and opportunities for the arts, comments on arts funding and development, as well as on the Arts Council's goals for 2011–14, and outlines more detailed areas of focus for each artform.

Although the original brief for Joining up the dots was unable to take this framework into account (as the consultation came later), both documents share many common themes. We decided that it would be useful to align them in this report, in order to highlight how dance agencies might best work within the Arts Council's future framework.

2 Future ways for working

As the Dance mapping report evidences, dance is in a good place. It's an artform in growth. Its popularity continues to increase, even within the current economic context.

Arts Council England's dance portfolio has increased its attendance at performances, exhibition days and film screening days by 103%, between 2007/08 and 2008/09. This is not the total picture for growth in dance, as it also features as part of the theatre and combined arts portfolios which present dance as part of their overall programmes.

New opportunities will undoubtedly emerge for agencies over the next ten years. In order to maximise benefit, we suggest that agencies explore how to work together more resourcefully across their network.

Shifting to a more coordinated operational approach will take time. In a 21st-century environment however, it is clear that organisations that find innovative approaches to creative development and resource management will have a greater chance of thriving.

Also, as the Arts Council reduces its own staff, some agencies (or federations of agencies) may want to take on a more prominent role in delivering key strategic functions.

The agency network is strongly positioned to develop new opportunities for dance, both for artists and audiences. Realising these will require new levels of working for some organisations, at board level as well as across staff teams.

Achieving great art for everyone points to public policies that value well-being and quality of life above economic growth: four out of five people in Britain believe that government's prime objective should be the greatest happiness rather than the greatest wealth. Dance is an artform that actively promotes a sense of well-being. It is referenced in the new economics foundation's (nef's) centre for well-being's set of five evidence-based actions that can improve personal well-being. The recommended actions are based on extensive research compiled by nef for the Government's Foresight project on Mental Capital and Well-being.¹

Dance agencies could collectively work to raise the profile of their work in relation to this area to tie in with new thinking on well-being economics.

Opportunities for working collectively extend beyond dance. There are new opportunities to be gained from cross-sector working, both in encouraging new talent to emerge and develop and also to build and sustain new audiences and participants across a range of contexts. The Dance mapping² report demonstrates that artists work in many contexts

¹ <http://www.nationalaccountsofwellbeing.org/news/archive/news>

²The *Dance mapping report: a window on dance*, is at www.artscouncil.org.uk/dancemapping

and move fluidly across industries and between the public, private and voluntary sectors. The sector is professionalising, adopting new business and leadership models and the report contains many successful examples, which could be shared.

Achieving great art for everyone acknowledges that audience habits are changing, especially in public and individual attitudes and behaviour. People are more demanding, more fickle and less deferential, demanding the same level of service and personalisation in the public sector that they have come to expect from the private sector. We are beginning to see a democratisation of the production and consumption of culture – more people able to create, express themselves and communicate with others in new ways; the distinction between artist and audience is no longer always clear cut.

How agencies respond to this changing environment will be for each to decide. But the need for change cannot be ignored: it is no longer possible to operate in the hierarchical ways characteristic of some parts of the dance field in the past. Audiences want to engage with the arts in a direct, varied and fluid way and artists have an equally multi-faceted approach, with interests spanning a variety of domains and geographic locations.

Making the most of the new opportunities may mean examining the current distribution of the agencies and how they serve both geographic and economic development needs of dance across the country. It also means understanding how to work more effectively in an international market context. This document does not tackle these areas, but we suggest that any follow-on work should properly explore these issues across regions, areas, nationally and internationally.

This report is being produced at a time of economic recession. Some of its proposals may not be realised in the short term or without additional resources. Others, however, might be achieved through rationalising the way agencies are managed. Exploring ways to implement more effective ways of working need to be part of the discussions around future agency provision. The recession may not be here for the long term, agencies need to be bold and visionary and think beyond the next three or even five years.

Recommended suggestions for development

Our suggestions are made in the context of Arts Council England clarifying its expectations of agencies and in the spirit of encouraging closer collaboration across all organisations that receive Arts Council funding, to develop new opportunities for dance.

The capacity of agencies to respond will vary depending on their size and stage of development. Further discussion will take place between the Arts Council and the sector over the coming months. The national framework for the arts will need to be determined before any final conclusions are reached in relation to how and when any suggestions contained within this report might be adopted.

The recommendations below are informed by the following principles.

- The dance agency network is a unique eco-system that spans the whole of England. Networks of agencies should be recognised across regions and areas; accepting that each individual agency will have different strengths and work at different scales, some with a specialist focus. These specialist areas of responsibility sometimes extend across Arts Council regional or 'area' borders.
- This national framework should identify, acknowledge and clearly communicate its relationships across the wider dance and arts infrastructure. It needs to take into account everyone engaged in producing or promoting dance, including dance and combined arts venues, touring dance companies, individual artists, the voluntary and commercial sectors and the education and health sectors.
- There is a need to re-clarify how different agency terms e.g. 'national dance agency', 'regional dance agency' are used. This is not seen as an issue for most agencies who now use their brand name e.g. 'DanceXchange' as their main identity. It was agreed that the term agency can be confusing, both for the dance sector and for the public.
- Any new dance agency framework will need to work within the context of new Arts Council funding models proposed in Achieving great art for everyone, once these are agreed and developed.

Development proposals are organised under the draft goal areas described in *Achieving Great Art for Everyone* and include:

Goal 1: Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated

Development of talent has been a priority for agencies since their inception in the 1980s. Much has been achieved over the past twenty years. This work could be built on through the following kinds of actions.

1. The development of talent needs to be aligned with a new focus on job creation, especially for artists. Different market contexts need to be better understood and analysed. Open access information, advice and guidance should be provided more widely through the agency network on how to develop the necessary skills to realistically sustain a portfolio dance career. Agencies need to better define their services, and their curatorial and development functions. The role of agency chief executives/artistic directors across these different areas of work needs to be acknowledged and clarified.
2. Agencies could develop a more coordinated approach to the professional development of the dance workforce, building on existing expertise and learning from other countries and other industries to create modular training packages to support artists' personal and professional growth. The provision of space for artists to create work should continue to be a priority. The development of a nationally coordinated professional development programme for dance might attract new funds from a range of sources.
3. A national approach could be established to building relationships with organisations that foster business development, such as Business Link, UKTI and Creative and Cultural Skills. Arts Council England could work with agencies to broker these relationships. Dialogue could take place with training institutions to encourage better alignment of dance training with workforce demands.

It might be necessary to redistribute or find new resources to support the early stages of coordination for these areas of talent development.

Goal 2: The Arts Leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

In common with many parts of the arts sector, dance agencies do not yet reflect the wider social and cultural population of England. There is a need to increase diversity across the leadership and workforce. There is also a need to increase knowledge and skill-sharing, in order to improve the dance sector's standards of governance and management and to share artistic practice.

4. Encouraging diversity should become more central to everyone's work, both in relation to the development of performance and practice and in relation to diversifying the workforce.
5. Several dance agencies focus on digital dance development through one or a combination of the following; commissioning, developing, producing or distributing dance and moving image work and screen dance. Although this is a growing area of artistic practice, there is not yet clear responsibility in relation to where the national overview of digital dance sits. This gap needs to be addressed, taking into account digital expertise across the sector.
6. Agencies, and in particular the 'national strategic organisations', should discuss how they could share their knowledge and services more effectively throughout the dance sector. Areas of specialism currently held by individual agencies could be transferred across the network. The Dance Training and Accreditation Project is one example of how this is being achieved. This could be used a model for other areas of development.
7. A programme of training for boards should be developed to equip them with the skills and knowledge to lead strategically and safeguard agency provision. This is particularly important in the current economic climate - these skills have never been more vital at board and senior management level.
8. Professional development to support artistic and business leadership should be further developed, building on the work carried out by the Cultural Leadership and Clore Leadership Programmes. This is particularly needed for individuals wanting to transition from a practice based role such as a choreographer or teacher, to a leadership role as an artistic or executive director. Professional development is also needed for emerging practitioners wanting to develop portfolio careers as teachers and community dance leaders.

Goal 3: More people value and enjoy the arts

The dance sector has been very successful in increasing and widening participation in dance. More needs to be done to develop new audiences for dance through connecting more deeply with other parts of the arts infrastructure engaged in promoting and developing dance.

The Dance mapping report showed that audience loyalty is usually to venues, rather than to particular promoters or touring companies. Artistic policies and agency audience development plans should take this into account.

9. Agencies should ensure that their partnerships with venues, artists and companies outline what level of support they can offer in relation to presenting, producing, touring, marketing and audience development. Programming strategies should aim to develop sustained audiences who return regularly. Action research could be carried out to test how dance producers can be most effective. National touring contracts for dance (like the current contracts offered by the Arts Council for theatre) could be a vehicle to explore this.
10. Agencies with access to public performance spaces and dedicated studio spaces for artists should be acknowledged as dance houses and choreographic workspaces. These spaces should be better connected as a network and touring circuit, and work more effectively to raise the profile of their work to audiences and stakeholders.
11. As well as working to strengthen 'hot spots' for dance activity, agencies should cooperate with partners to identify 'cold spots' or areas of non-engagement, and develop strategies to support artists and companies to work in these areas.

Goal 4: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

Almost all dance agencies work with young people and the network of agencies has developed significant experience in this area. Despite the fact that in schools dance is the second most popular PE activity to football, it is still not resourced well enough by education authorities to meet the growing demand and the dance sector is under pressure to provide expertise and support.

12. Resources permitting, Youth Dance England (YDE) should continue to be supported as the lead agency for dance and young people, working with regional partners to deliver a national dance strategy for children and young people's dance.³
13. Individual agencies should clarify their involvement in education. It should be accepted that not all agencies work in the same way. Agencies engaged in working with young people could ensure that their work compliments the national strategy, even if they are not formally regional partner organisations with YDE.

³ Commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Department of Children, Schools and Families Dance Programme Board, following 'The Dance Review: A Report to Government on Dance Education and Youth Dance in England by Tony Hall'
www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/dancereview

Goal 5: The arts sector is sustainable, resilient and innovative

Although dance organisations, along with those in most other artforms, are highly imaginative in making use of their resources, they face a challenge as a result of the continuing inconsistencies in the way agencies are funded; this has at times created an imbalance of provision across regions. Where agencies have been funded appropriately, sustainable organisations have been established, attracting significant matching investment from public and sometimes private sources. We need to assess how best to ensure similar resilience across more agencies, especially in a changing economic and political environment.

14. Agencies, especially the larger agencies, could begin to research and share knowledge in relation to diversifying their income streams to strengthen their resilience and sustainability. Agencies could also explore sharing services to release funds for artistic programmes where appropriate.
15. The different financial models of dance agencies need to be analysed closely to inform future funding needs. Clearer funding benchmarks could be established in relation to Arts Council England's overall strategic objectives, to help the Arts Council make informed funding decisions. Arts Council England dance officers suggest that upper levels of funding should not be capped and regions should retain the flexibility to fund agencies based on individual achievement and needs. Additional financial resources are unlikely in the current financial environment.
16. Most agencies rely on a range of organisations for partnership funding and other resources. Agencies have been broadly successful in conveying to funders the value of investing in a wide range of dance performances and opportunities to participate. In order to increase opportunity, development must be strategically planned rather than opportunistic; and crucially, owned at board level within organisations to ensure that provision is sustained.
17. Arts Council England, the National Dance Network and the strategic organisations should continue to work to widen commitment to dance by stakeholders such as local authorities, charitable trusts and foundations, health, education and central government.
18. Dance UK could work with the Foundation for Community Dance, Youth Dance England and the National Dance Network, to develop a written strategic plan for dance advocacy on a national, regional and local level to raise the profile of dance and its benefits among key stakeholders and policymakers across the country. The agency network could share responsibility for disseminating this.

3 Redefining Dance Agencies

We recognise that current terminology used to describe dance agencies (national, regional and local dance agencies) has in the main been developed and determined by the Arts Council.

Discussions about dance agency terminology (regional agencies, national agencies, dance houses etc) have taken place over many years but have never been resolved, leading to confusion over agency identity. This confusion is provoked by the fact that some regional agencies deliver similar scale programmes to some national dance agencies.

In the workshops held as part of producing this report, opinions were divided about the usefulness of the term 'national dance agency'. Many, including some national dance agencies, felt that the term was outdated and should be phased out. National dance agencies were perceived to work locally or regionally, with their national role focused on their shared work through the National Dance Network, which also includes a wide range of organisations, not just national dance agencies. Other national dance agencies, however, feared that losing the label might also mean loss of status and funding in a difficult economic environment.

Smaller regional agencies understand that whatever their ambitions they cannot compete with larger agencies in relation to the scale of work they offer. They feel that what they bring to the overall agency network is local knowledge and specialist expertise. Their local activity is widely valued. The smaller agencies recognise the value of being part of a network and welcome working more closely on regional and national levels to develop umbrella partnerships, shared services and shared knowledge.

Some agencies included in the study saw themselves as distinct from other agencies. Portland Green Cultural Projects, for example, does not see itself solely as a dance development agency as it also produces work in other areas of the arts and creative industries and Jabadao has recently repositioned itself as a national advisory agency.

The current framework for dance agencies, which focuses on national, regional and strategic umbrella organisations, does not work any more. New organisational models are emerging, buildings are being developed and some agencies have elected to reshape their policies to move in new directions responding to the needs of artists and communities in a wide range of places. We welcome these shifts and the expansion of dance opportunities that agencies have provided. We acknowledge that current funding models do not always best support agencies and their work.

The Arts Council is committed to producing a clearer intellectual framework to inform its decisions about what to fund. This is what Achieving great art for everyone will do.

What follows are some outline ideas on how we might better define dance agencies within this framework for the future.

A dance eco-system

Rather than see the agency network as a top-down system with national umbrella organisations and national dance agencies at the top and regional dance agencies at the bottom, it is proposed that we look at provision across England as an eco-system which works through mutual cooperation.

It is proposed that the term 'national dance agency' is no longer used. Most national dance agencies are now individual brands that far outweigh their identity as a national dance agency. Many of these organisations have shown that they are capable of development far beyond what was originally conceived as a national dance agency. They are now, in the main, positioned securely enough not to have to wear a national dance agency badge to justify their existence.

As part of their funding agreement, it would be possible to ask all organisations in the Arts Council's portfolio of funded dance agencies to collaborate together to ensure better opportunities for dance, on a local, regional, national and at times international level. All dance organisations funded by the Arts Council should commit to placing dance as an artform at the heart of their work although it is acknowledged that some contextualise this in wider cross disciplinary interests. Positive collective working, which promotes the sharing of knowledge and resources, should be rewarded. Better resourced agencies may wish to play a leadership role to foster this kind of working.

The overall term dance agency should remain – it is used widely and a more appropriate name has not emerged at this stage. The word development could be added, to rename agencies 'dance development agencies', which might help organisations explain their remit, locally and regionally. But primarily organisations should be encouraged to use their own brand names to express their identity.

In addition to being a 'dance development agency', some organisations are also based in buildings. The Arts Council should continue to take this into account in determining funding allocations. In some regions the speed of increase and development in the size and number of buildings has not been matched by Arts Council England increases in funding for the regularly funded organisations concerned.

Outline remits for different types of organisations are described below. It should be acknowledged that these are broad descriptions and that individual agencies will focus on different areas within and across them at different stages of their development.

National strategic organisations

Collectively these organisations are currently responsible for the following:⁴

- the development of national projects focusing on professional development for artists, teachers and managers
- collating national data and disseminating information, advocacy and lobbying on behalf of the dance sector
- advice and guidance to the dance sector
- the development of strong networks with external partners (including other artforms) to support this
- promoting more coherence within dance (that is, greater status and funds for the independent sector and more equality with other artforms)
- nurturing a range of champions among opinion-formers and others of influence (journalists, political figures, and so on)
- the development of partnerships with other agencies to support and provide a more 'joined up' service for dancers and public.

Dance development agency

Overall the network of Arts Council funded dance development agencies should collectively provide:

- leadership, advocacy and profile-raising for dance
- artist and audience development
- live and/or digital dance promotion independently and with co-promoters/venues, to increase and diversify audiences and widen regional expertise in presenting dance
- offer areas of specialism (for example, production/touring/digital/diversity/youth and community dance) to support and inform the wider network
- the development of local dance opportunities in cities and sub-regions, including festivals and special events
- regional infrastructure development to grow sustained dance provision
- strategic community and education activity linked to generating new audiences for high-quality performance work
- connections into the regional, national and international ecology to ensure local and regional provision is linked into the wider dance marketplace to maximise opportunities for artists, organisations and audiences
- networked activity delivering national projects, such as British Dance Edition, Dance Training and Accreditation Project (DTAP), Youth Dance England regional plans, National Dance Network (NDN) small-scale touring project, where appropriate.

⁴ This list was broadly agreed by national umbrella and strategic organisations in 2005.

Dance houses and choreographic workspaces

Some agencies (and venues) could be funded as dance houses and/or choreographic workspaces, where these spaces support their core agency function.

A dance house⁵ could:

- have access to a building that offers both rehearsal, production and performance space for dance artists and choreographers
- be committed to research, produce and present high-quality dance performances to public audiences
- have a clearly defined programme of artist support, including Arts Council England regularly-funded touring companies
- have the commitment, knowledge and skill to diversify and grow audiences for dance, as part of planned audience development programmes in partnership with other dance providers
- ensure its community and education programmes are linked to audience development
- be prepared to play a leadership role to support in collaborative working and the development of a shared regional, national and international overview.

A choreographic workspace could:

- provide dance artists and choreographers with access to subsidised studio space to create, develop and rehearse their performance work
- establish creative dance clusters through providing artists with shared office space or hot-desking
- provide access to artistic and business support by offering professional information, advice and guidance
- offer networking opportunities to enhance creative partnerships and understand market opportunities
- help choreographers showcase their work to promoters and the public
- broker producing opportunities for individual artists
- exist in spaces such as schools, venues, leisure centres and sports spaces through potential partnerships with higher education and further education, incorporating dance research and development and production into broader cultural settings.

The Arts Council acknowledges that organisations will want to focus on other areas of activity as well as those listed above. We are trying however, to clarify overall areas of agencies' work, in order to identify how we might fund dance more effectively in the future.

⁵ Sadler's Wells is an exception as a dance house that is not also an agency. In time other similar dance houses might develop in other parts of the country.

The descriptions above are not finite. Some agencies, for example, deliver health-based community programmes, centres for advanced training (CATs) through Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funding or vocational training programmes in partnership with local authorities, colleges, or universities.

The overall mix of individual agencies' activity will be influenced by different regional development needs and artistic drivers.

What now?

The ideas in this report were discussed with Arts Council officers and agencies at a meeting in October 2009. It was agreed that the responsibility for their implementation is a shared one. More work will need to be carried out to identify who could lead on each area, and to identify a range of resources to support their development.

We suggest that a small working group is formed with representation from agencies and Arts Council England. The group's task will be to consider how to move forward from May 2010 with the ideas in this report.

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Arts Council England 2010

4 Appendices

1 Background and context

Arts Council England currently funds 72 regularly funded dance organisations, of which 30 are producing or touring dance companies. The remaining 42 are local, regional or national agencies, and include three festivals or venues.

Some of these organisations are new to the Arts Council funding portfolio; others have been funded for more than 20 years. This report focuses on the group of organisations that we call agencies, which share some characteristics, although arguably each is unique in the way it works and its local or national context. In preparing the report we have consulted with a wide range of agencies including Grants for the arts funded agencies, however the main focus is centred on regularly funded organisations.

The terms used to describe this group of organisations vary from region to region. Agencies, regional dance agencies, national dance agencies, community dance projects and dance houses are all terms that have been used at different stages of each organisation's development as well as, of course, organisations' own brand names, such as DanceEast or DanceXchange. The growth of some of these organisations⁶ has been exponential.

Overall from 2004-2007 agencies generated 4,380 performances and 106,289 education sessions. They estimated that they have generated an 115 per cent increase in engagement through performance and participation over this three year period through estimated engagement with almost 3.5 million (3,343,916) people. The total number of performances grew by 49 per cent and the total number of education sessions by 28 per cent. The overall subsidy per head can therefore be calculated at £7.

In 2004–2007, Arts Council England's investment of £24,760,228 levered in partnership funding of £25,429,789 and the agencies as a whole were 49 per cent reliant on Arts Council England funding for their income. An increase in Arts Council England investment of 20 per cent has been matched by an overall increase in partnership funding of 17 per cent in the three-year period. Total turnover has increased by 20 per cent.

Historically, (until the late 1990's), Arts Council of England⁷ had lead responsibility for the national dance agencies while the regional arts boards developed their own strategies for funding regional and sub-regional agencies. Different priorities and geographies led to quite distinct regional portfolios. The East region, for instance, has given priority to

⁶ These figures only refer to the regularly funded organisations that submitted annual returns from 2004-2007 and the data contained within these returns.

⁷ Arts Council of England National Office, based in London with responsibility for national overview of the arts.

developing a dance house in Suffolk, working alongside smaller agencies placed across the region, whereas in the South West region a federal approach has been taken, with Dance South West acting as an umbrella body supporting and developing the work of county agencies as they emerge.

In the wake of the Arts Council's restructure in 2003, all of these dance agencies are now combined within one national portfolio, with regional offices taking lead responsibility for all organisations within their regions. All these organisations are managed through the dance portfolio. Some link up with organisations in other portfolios, especially combined arts, theatre and visual arts.

There are a growing number of purpose-built dance spaces, ranging from Dance City in the North East to DanceXchange in the West Midlands, and the new Jerwood DanceHouse in Suffolk, all funded through Arts Council's lottery programmes, alongside other partners. Spaces such as the Siobhan Davies Dance Studios in London have been developed outside of the agency portfolio.

New buildings are under development in Leeds, and Bournemouth, with plans advancing for buildings in Nottingham and Brighton. No recent national work has been undertaken to establish future revenue needs of building-based dance organisations to support their running and programming costs.

Three major pieces of Arts Council published work have focused on dance agencies. In 1989 Graham Devlin produced *Stepping forward*, which provided a basis for Katie Venner's feasibility study on regional dance agencies, published in June 1990. Graham Devlin also conducted a review of the national dance agencies in the mid-1990s and in 2005 he reviewed the national umbrella⁸ dance organisations.

The landscape has changed and grown significantly since the publication of these reports. Agency work is not easy to define; the focus on partnership working makes it complex to analyse, particularly as an increasing number of venues, such as Sadler's Wells and The Lowry, are engaging in similar development activity.

An earlier draft of this report included venues and festivals in the overall statistical analysis. They have since been removed on the basis that whilst some of them engage in 'agency type' development work, they are not funded as agencies.

⁸ National strategic organisations, such as Dance UK and the Foundation for Community Dance

2 Achieving great art for everyone – a national framework for the arts

We are aiming to build on the current Arts Council Plan to develop a clear articulation of the difference Arts Council England will make over the next ten years, to propose a set of compelling long-term goals for Arts Council England and to develop a stronger framework within which to plan activities, forge the necessary partnerships and invest our resources in order to achieve those goals.

Some principles

There will be a 10-year strategic framework for Arts Council England, built from the current Arts Council plan. It will focus on how we work with our stakeholders to achieve great art for everyone and also the five outcomes: excellence, reach, engagement, innovation and diversity, described in our 3 year plan, Great art for everyone 2008-2011, Arts Council 2008.⁹

It will be the point of reference for all of the Arts Council's processes and funding programmes; i.e. a planning and operating framework for the Arts Council.

At the heart of the framework will be a set of long-term goals for the Arts Council, agreed widely, and aiming to inspire everyone interested in achieving great art for everyone.

There will be three clear benefits

- big stories for Arts Council England to rally round, giving clarity and focus to our mission and outcome
- greater shared vision and collaboration among the arts community, with our key partners and also across the commercial, voluntary and subsidised sectors
- a strong signal to government about the long-term value of the arts to society and the economy

The goals currently under discussion are:

- Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated
- The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled
- More people value and enjoy the arts
- Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts
- The arts sector is sustainable, resilient and innovative

⁹ *Great art for everyone 2008-2011*, Arts Council England 2008
http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/arts_council_plan.pdf

3 Summary discussion from the agency consultation meetings

Overall ecology

In the meetings held to consult dance agencies, people agreed that the agency 'map' has developed in stages. National dance agencies were initially established as part of a national policy framework to provide one major agency per region to encourage dance – providing professional development, audience development and education and community participation programmes across regions.

Gradually these national dance agencies refocused their work programmes to match available resources and individual artistic directors' and boards' development priorities. Other agencies have since been established as regional and local providers, sometimes to fill gaps in the ecology around national dance agencies and sometimes to deliver goals of specific local and regional agendas.

The definition of 'agency' is not clear any more. Almost everyone agreed this needs to be resolved. Calling organisations that have been primarily set up to respond to regional development needs 'national dance agencies' is contradictory. We need to be clearer about what is expected of these organisations' different roles, which often involve balancing a multiplicity of priorities.

It was clear to everyone that agencies are at different stages of development and continue to evolve. There should not be a sense of working towards a static model or a fixed infrastructure. It was also felt that agencies have different strengths and specialisms, and should not be expected to deliver similar programmes across the country.

Some people questioned the need for all the organisations to be called agencies, and indeed wondered whether each one even had the resources to act effectively as an agency; they suggested that organisations should be allowed to focus on specialisms that complement but do not duplicate the work of other dance organisations across regions. Some people questioned the Arts Council's new focus on 'greatness' as in 'great art for everyone'. One contributor said that their agency wanted, 'to be part of a huge range of artistic work that places connection, relationship and relevance at the centre rather than "greatness"'.

There was a plea to the Arts Council to be clearer about what it wants to fund and on what grounds because, 'there is never enough money to go around'. People need to understand why some organisations get funded and others do not.

There was a strong feeling that agencies need to have a better overview of the overall dance ecology than they hold at present, both regionally, and nationally.

Demand for agency work is growing, particularly in relation to regional development responsibilities. Future development needs to be realistic as well as aspirational. There needs to be a careful balancing of national strategic imperatives and regional priorities.

Whether based in venues or not, people agreed that the continued development of 'hot spots' for dance outside London is much needed, strengthening the national infrastructure to support a diverse mix of dance through strategic programmes, delivered through partnership working across the dance and arts sector. Strengthening existing 'hot spots' was felt to be important, as well as developing new ones. The challenge of achieving the latter should not be underestimated.

The quality of relationships between artists, companies and agencies and between agencies themselves varies. There is not always consistency across regions in relation to how agencies operate, and the relationships between regional and national dance agencies are unclear.

Discussion with agencies of the goals in Achieving great arts for everyone

Goal 1: Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated

Risk-taking and innovation is high on the agenda for many agencies who feel that providing research and development is a vital area of what an agency should be doing. Agencies feel it is their responsibility to improve the quality of choreography and dance practice.

Agencies felt that they should be providing better support to emerging artists if they are going to successfully develop world-class choreographers and dancers. It was felt that they do not make best use of the role models dance has to offer, particularly in the field of community dance, and that networks could also be used more effectively to offer support through sharing knowledge and raising the profile of examples of good practice.

Most agencies agreed that support for choreographic development takes place in an ad hoc way, and that it would benefit from better coordination. More support should be provided for producers to support artists to make work and tour it. Dance producers should be encouraged to work in a range of contexts including venues, organisations and dance companies, as well as independently.

Professional development must reflect the needs of artists at different stages of their careers. It was felt that there was sometimes an over-emphasis on emerging artists. There is potential for sharing models, for baseline information to be provided online and to learn from other industries.

Agencies' relationships with artists arise through shared interests, not because the artists live nearby; regional boundaries can be an obstacle to distribution and innovative collaboration.

Artists felt that agencies' roles were not always clear and suggested that their policies could be communicated more clearly and publicly. Agencies acknowledged that they could listen and respond to the views of artists more effectively and develop more honesty and transparency in dialogue with artists and in how they communicate decision-making processes.

As part of that process agencies need to define their services as well as their curatorial function. The role of agency chief executive officers/artistic directors across both areas of work needs to be acknowledged and clarified.

The discussion about innovation focused primarily on artistic development rather than on agencies' business models and overall approach to business development.

Stimulating, developing and promoting world-class dance must include world-class community dance.¹⁰

Most agencies felt that there are opportunities for more collaboration with Higher Education, including the conservatoires, to ensure that talent is given the best opportunity and training is fit for purpose.

Goal 2: The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

There was a strong feeling that diversity – encouraging work at all levels by all segments of the population, such as ethnic minorities and disabled or older people – should be a core part of all agencies' priorities, and that they should aim to work with agencies set up to focus on promoting culturally diverse work more effectively. Access to high-quality staff and artists from a diverse range of backgrounds is however sometimes difficult, especially for rural agencies, who often struggle to find locally-based dance artists from a wide range of backgrounds to develop and sustain work.

Some agencies feel that there is still a weak infrastructure for professional development for culturally diverse artists and managers, despite acknowledging increased investment

¹⁰ Information about community dance can be sourced at www.communitydance.org.uk. The Foundation for Community Dance is the professional organisation for anyone involved in creating opportunities for people to experience and participate in dance

in this area. It was suggested there should be greater training to ensure that diversity development is part of agency's work because agencies could do more to encourage culturally diverse managers and programmes of work.

Most agencies agree that programmes should contain more cultural diversity. Some agencies use dance as a tool for encouraging 'social inclusion' with the aim of developing sustainable models of innovative practice that increase employability, encourage lifelong learning and increased confidence. It was agreed that more should be done to 'engage with the disengaged'.

Disability was not discussed in great depth, except to acknowledge not only the growing range and breadth of high-quality performance work that is now available to tour and also that dance had led the way in the development of integrated practice and participatory disability work.

There was a feeling that agencies need to promote more trust, and reduce competitive culture among themselves to encourage collegiate working and sharing of best practice.

There is little professional development and succession planning for agency staff. If the workforce is to diversify this needs to be addressed.

The development of present and future leaders also continues to be an issue. Board development was also seen to be important.

Goal 3: More people value and enjoy the arts

Agencies in the Arts Council's regularly funded portfolio of dance organisations have increased engagement and participation by around 80 per cent from 2004 to 2008, but audiences are still low compared to some other artforms. Participation is a major contributor to this growth. Some of this work is self-sustaining; i.e. it does not require subsidy to survive. This is not always possible, given the need to teach dance in small classes to ensure both health and safety, and quality of experience.

Funding dance participation is becoming easier, and a range of organisations including local authorities, health providers and the youth service are now issuing contracts for dance services, as well as schemes such as Creative Partnerships and Find Your Talent. Ensuring high quality was still perceived to be challenging, with agencies regularly under pressure to act as 'brokers' between artists and funding partners, endeavouring to ensure that dance's intrinsic values are protected, while at the same time offering 'extrinsic' worth to meet partners' goals and targets.

Dance was still felt to be an artform for the young, with not enough attention paid to the needs of older audience members and participants. This is seen to be an increasingly

pressing issue as the population ages – there were more people over 60 than there were children for the first time in 2001, and the over-80s population is predicted to double by 2031 to five million.

Providing engagement was felt to be important, especially in the context of the health and wellbeing agenda. Many agency programmes are reliant on project funding which means activity does not take place all year round.

Dance requires specialist spaces and agencies with their own buildings and venues tend to have a higher public profile, leverage and control over producing and presenting work. Greater understanding of the demands and costs of running buildings is needed from Arts Council England.

Touring was not discussed widely by the agencies and some felt that their role should focus on risk and talent development as opposed to touring. It was felt that dance touring suffered from insufficiently experienced producers and managers and that more talented and entrepreneurial producers were needed from a range of backgrounds.

It was acknowledged that improving touring opportunities was critical in relation to increasing opportunities for audiences to engage with dance performance. Not all regions benefit from national touring. Dance agencies did not always feel empowered to influence promoters as effectively as they would like to.

There was confusion in relation to where the leadership for touring is currently coming from – both at the Arts Council and across the sector. People agreed that a touring/distribution overview at all scales was needed.

It was felt that agencies should review what's possible in relation to their touring role and be clear about it. Dance Touring Partnership and Dance Consortium play very specific roles and whatever agencies do needs to be complementary.

The National Dance Network is working toward greater collaboration in relation to touring. This will potentially increase distribution. Better coordinated work between agencies, companies, presenting venues, and audience development agencies could be developed to benefit touring at all scales. The role of the dance producer could be made clearer and developed within this overall context.

The dance workforce is concentrated in London and the south-east, partly because that is where training mainly takes place and partly because of the attraction of the capital for other creative activity. The population demographic in London gives rise to an agency model that is distinct from those outside the capital.

Goal 4: Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

This area was acknowledged as important, although some agencies felt it was sometimes over-emphasised. Opinions were divided as to whether it should be a core part of every agency's remit. The historical remit for agencies was focused on professional artists.

Dance agencies play a vital role in offering young people a variety of opportunities to take part in dance. Most agencies felt a responsibility to 'talent spot' among both children and young people and artists.

It was felt that individual agencies needed to clarify their involvement in education. Dance education is a varied field, and agencies should communicate more clearly which elements of dance education they are interested in.

Some agencies have been designated as centres for advanced training, (CATs) through partnering with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to be part of the national strategy towards excellence for music and dance. The centres were welcomed although it was felt that they should establish a better shared approach to widening access and continue to offer culturally diverse dance training. Their recruitment should take into account widening access to a more culturally diverse range of young people.

Youth Dance England is now established as a strengthened national development agency for youth dance. It has developed partnerships with one organisation in each region, some of which are agencies, to deliver a wide-ranging and highly strategic programme of work until 2011.

Most agencies agreed that Youth Dance England has been instrumental in supporting the current infrastructure to deliver more effectively. This was felt to be a highly constructive way of working as opposed to creating an entirely new infrastructure, and agencies welcomed its arrival and the new income streams provided through its work.

Some agencies have developed partnerships with universities to develop bespoke courses; others provide access to regular training opportunities through short courses and residencies and one-off classes and workshops.

Quality control across all education work was felt to be an issue needing attention. In general, freelancers are employed to work with children and young people and monitoring the quality of their teaching is difficult but necessary. The reliance of provision for children and young people on young graduate dancers is a major issue. In general, new dance graduates do not have strong enough skill sets to teach effectively. This is a cause for concern, given that teaching is the most likely source of regular income for many young dancers.

There is also a growing issue about what teaching qualifications practitioners should have. It is becoming increasingly difficult for dance artists to gain employment in certain sectors, for instance, adult learning, without recognised teaching qualifications. The work of the Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership (DTAP) was welcomed, as well as the achievements of the sports sector in addressing this issue. It was felt that dance could learn from this.

Agencies' budgets for training are often small, even for core staff. Training is more likely to take place 'on the job' or occasionally through apprenticeship schemes. This ad hoc approach is not developing workforce skills quickly enough to meet demand, especially in relation to the growing opportunities that are now emerging, in specialist areas such as health and disability.

In the field of South Asian dance there are further complex issues. Dance is not always seen as a career by South Asian dance students partly due to a lack of role models. Many develop dance as a part-time career, supported by other sources of professional income, often from an unrelated field. However the accreditation schemes such as those offered by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) have helped develop an understanding that dance can be taken seriously as a profession, and there is now a progression route via a new centre for advanced training (CAT) in one region, focussing on South Asian Dance. Higher education and conservatoire provision however remains an issue that needs to be resolved.

Similarly there are issues for the Black dance sector. Agencies such as the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD) and State of Emergency are working to raise the profile of Black dance, but there is still an imbalance in the number of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds participating in dance, especially coming into the vocational schools, even in places that have achieved great success in this area of work such as Leeds.

The relationship between agencies and the private dance sector and teaching organisations is at an early stage of development. It is complex and fuelled by commercial sensitivities, but better relationships would benefit dance as a whole. There are some examples of agency practice that are beginning to achieve this.

Some people felt that opportunities and initiatives for dance were too restricted to those who were deemed 'gifted and talented', at the expense of young people who just want to dance for fun, and that this put pressure on agencies at times.

Provision for young people does not always make the link between participation (dancing) and performance (going to see dance) clearly enough.

Goal 5: The arts sector is sustainable, resilient and innovative

Agencies all felt that there should be a louder voice for dance locally and nationally. Some felt this should encompass all aspects of dance and solicit celebrity endorsement to increase visibility. Others shied away from this and felt that small and local can be more effective. Overall the agencies felt they could work together more effectively to raise awareness of what dance can offer on regional and national levels.

Agencies felt that there was scope to cooperate more closely in establishing priorities for regional dance development and in making the most of opportunities, including those in the commercial domain. Although some very good examples of partnerships between agencies – and between agencies and other partners – are beginning to emerge, there is still not enough coordination and sharing of knowledge.

Members of the National Dance Network are working towards exploring how to work together more closely to share knowledge and resources. To do so effectively will however necessitate a culture change in the way these organisations work together.

Agencies felt that together with the Arts Council they should develop a more systematic overview of dance at both national and regional levels. It was suggested that, as one contributor said, this would ‘wholly depend on establishing a relationship with Arts Council England that is built on mutual trust and a shared agenda – that is grownup and is working towards the same objectives’.

Another contributor to the discussion was concerned that, ‘what might be missing now, and lost still further in the restructuring of Arts Council is deep knowledge of the trajectory of certain artists – where they are in their journey and how their artistic “blueprint” is emerging’. Agencies felt they had the knowledge to help redress that potential loss of expertise.

There was general agreement about the importance of further developing ‘hot spots’ for dance across the country as catalysts for dance development. It was also felt important to identify ‘cold spots’ and to extend dance to them through ‘beacon’ organisations and projects and touring.

Agencies see themselves as catalysts for international work. Some are very active in this area, both abroad and through bringing foreign companies to the UK. The excellence and innovation of some British community and education work is internationally recognised. This was considered to be an under resourced area of work, both in import and export.

Analysis of agencies included in report

Agency Activity Analysis 2009	Building	Production/commission/ Professional Work	Presenting in own spaces	Presenting in other spaces	Professional touring	Young people's programmes	Community programmes	Vocational training	Professional development	Regional development (in addition to work at base)	National Strategic Development
DanceEast											
Dance4											
Contemporary Dance Trust											
Dance City											
DanceXchange											
South East Dance											
Dance South West											
Swindon Dance											
Yorkshire Dance											
Dance Digital											
DEDA											
Lincolnshire Dance											
East London Dance											
Greenwich Dance											
Tees Valley Dance											
Dancefest											
Cheshire Dance											
Dance Initiative Greater Manchester											
Ludus											
Merseyside Dance Initiative											
Hampshire Dance											
Activate(Dorset)											
Gloucestershire Dance											
The Works											
Take Art											
Danceworks UK											
Jabadao											
Kala Sangam											

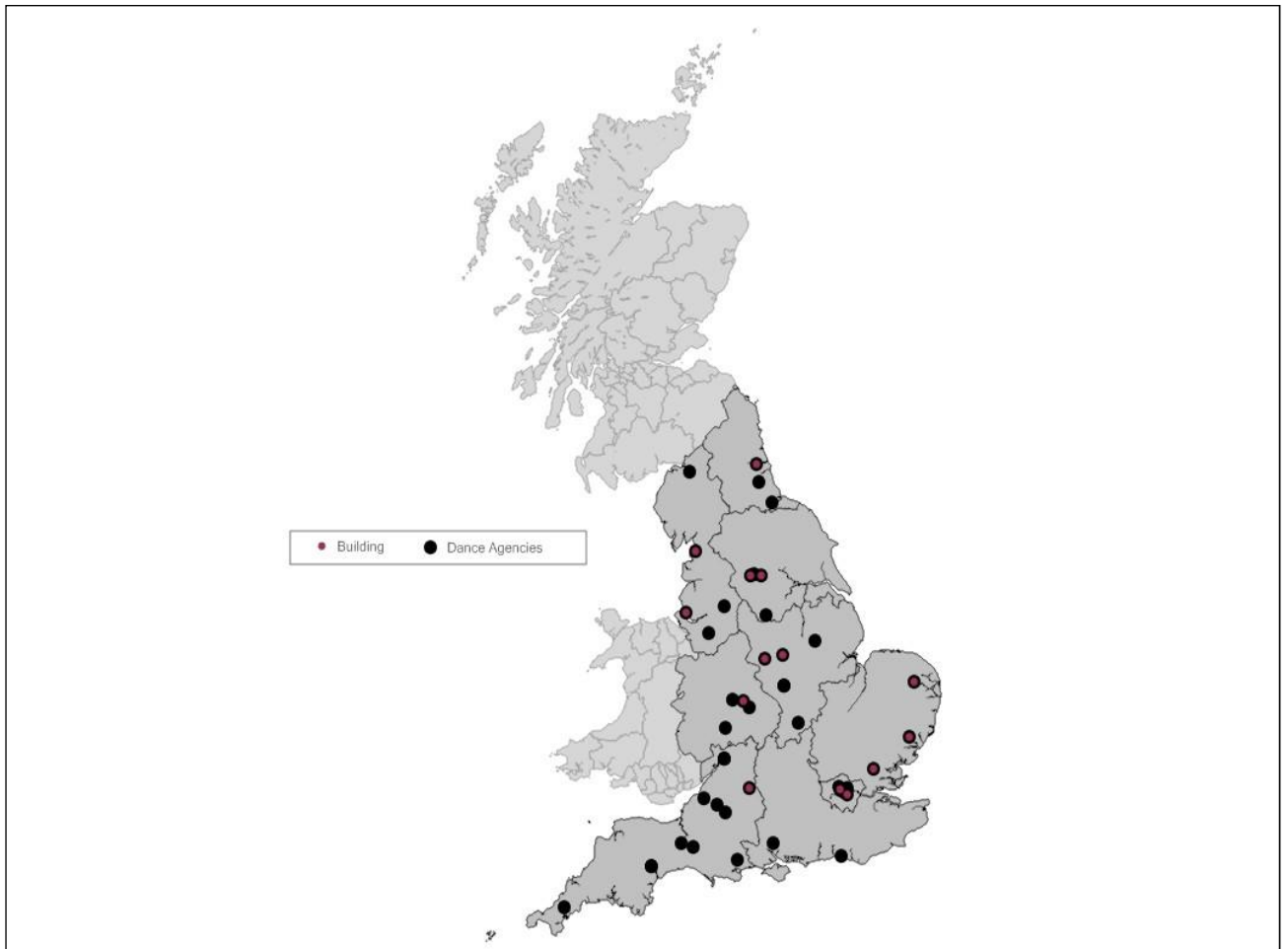
Agency Activity Analysis 2009	Building	Production/commission/ Professional Work	Presenting in own spaces	Presenting in other spaces	Professional touring	Young people's programmes	Community programmes	Vocational training	Professional development	Regional development (in addition to work at base)	National Strategic Development
Foundation for Community Dance											
Youth Dance England											
Dance UK											
ADAD											
Akademi											
State of Emergency											
Portland Green Cultural Projects											
Bath Dance											
Dance in Devon											
Dance South Gloucestershire											
Dudley Dance											
Norfolk Dance											
Wiltshire Dancing											
Northants Dance											
Dancescape											
Tin Arts											
Cumbria Dance											
Leicester Dance											
Plymouth Dance											
Dance in Bristol											

Key

Programme areas	
In development	
Including Youth Dance England	
Including Centre for Advanced Training ²⁰	
Including Centre for Advanced Training & Youth Dance England	

²⁰ Other Centres for Advanced Training are located at Laban , The Lowry, Northern Ballet Theatre and the Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Agency map – buildings dedicated to dance are highlighted in red



5 People who attended consultation meetings 2008–2009

Agencies

Deb Ashby, Dance Initiative Greater Manchester
Anthony Baker, Dance Digital
Ken Bartlett, Foundation for Community Dance
Janice Banks, Swindon Dance
Rose Beeston, Dancefest
Kyla Booth-Lucking, South East Dance
Assis Carreiro, DanceEast
Kate Castle, Dance South West
Sarah Cobley, Dance South West
Angela Conlan, Wiltshire Dancing
Wieke Eringa, Yorkshire Dance
Chris Fogg, Take Art
Lucy Frazer, Hampshire Dance
Kiki Gale, East London Dance
Karen Gallagher, Merseyside Dance Initiative
Peter Huggins, Dance City
Adam Holloway, Cheshire Dance
Sarah Jassall, Northamptonshire Dance
Mira Kaushik, Akademi
Brendan Keaney, Greenwich Dance
Ralph Lister, National Rural Touring Forum
David Massingham, DanceXchange
Marie McCluskey, Swindon Dance
Jacqueline McCormick, Cheshire Dance
Ian McKeown, Dance City
Caroline Moss, Northamptonshire County Council
Stephen Munn, DEDA
Eddie Nixon, The Place
Keyna Paul, Lincolnshire Dance
Penny Rae, Dance City
Piali Ray, Sampad
Paul Russ, Dance4
Charlotte Semlyen, South East Dance
John Struthers, Dance South West
Mairead Turner, Danceworks
Kenneth Tharp, Contemporary Dance Trust
Chris Thompson, Contemporary Dance Trust

Agency Chairs

Bob Lockyer – South East Dance, Christopher Barron – Dance 4, John Struthers – Dance South West, James Hehir – Dance East, Lionel Joyce – Dance City, Lynn Vardy – Swindon Dance, Merle Wray – DanceXchange, Ros Beattie – Yorkshire Dance, Sue Harrison – Merseyside Dance Initiative.

Artist consultation

Swindon

Banxy, Vicki Bailey, Hannah de Cancho, Susie Crow, Laila Diallo, Sarah Ferris, Marie Louise Flexen, Helen Ganberg, Adrienne Hart, Sushmita Pati-Long, Marie McLuskey, Sue Davies

London

Anais Bouts, Rachel Gomme, Andrew Downes, Rosie Heafford, Thomas Kampe, Aya Kobayashi, Neil Luck, Jane Mclean, Steph McMann, Anna-Liisa Parkkinen, Karin Fisher-Potisk, Hilary Stainsby, Katy Pearce, Lauren Potter, Maria Rita Salvi, Matthias Sperling, Lauren Tucker, Helena Webb, Janine Harrington, Fiona Millward

Leeds

Sophie Alder, Marie Andersen, Manuela Berndtm, Rachel Bradbear, Beth Cassani Gary Clarke, Vanessa Grasse, James Jackson, Rita Marcalo, Riccardo Meneghini, Sian Myers, Mia Neilson, Phil Sanger, Daliah Toure, Kathinka Walter, Jenni Wren, Weike Eringa, Sarah Shead

Arts Council England

Janet Archer, Theresa Beattie, Suzannah Bedford, Raul Calderon, Desi Cherrington, Kate Costello, Sarah Da Fonseca, Anu Giri, Pam Johnson, Fiona McKeown, Wanjiku Nyachae, Sri Sarker, Jan De Schynkel, Anneliese Slader, Jamie Watton, Rachael Willis-Griffin, Tanya Wilmer, Sherry de Wynter