

Creative Scotland Dance Sector Review: Report on Dance Re- view Workshops

Report on Dance Review Workshops for Creative Scotland

“michael clark dance troupe so brilliant tonight @macrobert Stirling that they made me want to give up movies” Mark Cousins 24 May 2012

1. Overview

I have had the enormous and genuine privilege to spend time with a wide range of representatives of the dance world in Scotland in a contracted period of two weeks. I facilitated 6 structured workshops, each 3 hours long: 2 specifically for infrastructure and programming organizations, and 4 open sessions in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness involving over 80 individuals in total. The notes of these sessions are all attached to this report and I encourage the Steering Group of the Dance Review to read them – however, I have taken some of the quotes and included them here, so you will have a good overview if you only read this document. I have also attached the schedule for the open sessions and the Exercise Handouts.

My brief was to take the temperature of the dance sector, understand the sector’s capacity for change and vision, and enable them to have a voice in the process of the review. I also wanted to enable participants to talk to each other, learn from each other, to build sector self-awareness and a collective aspiration.

The workshops attracted people from a wide-variety of dance styles, artforms, experience, geography and roles within dance – artists/choreographers/dancers, producers, leaders, teachers (teaching all age-groups, styles and from different sectors and regions), lighting designers/technicians, community practitioners, programmers, organizational managers, marketers, entrepreneurs, physical trainers, local authorities, youth workers, public art commissioners, venue managers, theatre artists, visual arts specialists, all of whom have committed time, energy, intelligence, passion and ideas to this process. I cannot thank them enough for the intelligence, time and hard work they put into each of these sessions.

Over and over again, I heard people wanting dance to raise its game, to increase the quality of work and experience at all levels, and to take a bolder place in arts and culture in Scotland’s future. Importantly, there was a collective recognition that this was about Scotland’s place in the world. There was a real desire to see international work and dance in and from Scotland to be recognized in an international context. This came from every sector: ballet, contemporary, traditional dance, world dance, teaching at all levels, and from artists. This is a new phenomenon to me, and a testament to the huge amount of dedicated work that has been put into the sector over the last few years. It is also impressive in that dance is traditionally places itself in a more modest and lowly place in the cultural hierarchy. I welcome this ambition wholeheartedly.

This report is a brief synopsis of what I heard and an outline of the key themes I have identified. The material is vast. You will see some contradictions – particularly for example, between the sense of shared generosity in the sector in Scotland, and its sense of its inability to honestly critique work and a perceived glass-ceiling. I suspect readers of the material might infer one or two different conclusions to mine, with the ability to see the material more dispassionately. I would hope though, that the strengths, weakness, aspirations and solutions are all easily seen in the material, and that they would align with other research that is being carried out through the Dance Review process.

I was impressed and inspired by what I heard. People were genuinely excited to be working together to create a collective aspiration for dance in Scotland. The process and the importance of the review to the sector have generated a strong request and expectation to hear and see the outcomes of the review. I understand that how this might happen is still under discussion at Creative Scotland.

Overall, I perceived a sector that collectively understands its strengths and its weaknesses in the context of a Scottish cultural ecology, and internationally, with one or two regional variations.

The consistent aspirations for the future were:

- A hunger and shared aspiration for a huge vision for dance in Scotland in the next ten years
- A willingness and readiness to embrace change and be responsible for taking part in that change
- A shared sense that the dance world in Scotland is diverse and inclusive, with a greater willingness to collaborate towards a shared vision than I had anticipated
- A shared understanding of the key issues that need to be addressed to develop the quality, diversity, participation and excitement that dance in Scotland could achieve within the next 10 years
- A shared sense that dance has something special and unique to offer Scotland, and what that 'special' thing is.

The consistent sense of the strengths were:

- The value and importance of dance as an artform
- A strong, intelligent Scottish dance community
- Diversity of practice and career opportunities
- A lot of work has been done to build the infrastructure and develop dance in Scotland
- Readiness for a change
- General values of the sector and the quality of generosity within the sector.

The most consistent sense of the weaknesses were:

- A concern about the quality of work developed in Scotland
- A concern to develop the quality of education and training of dancers

- In particular, a consistent request to lobby for a PGCE in Dance, so that high quality dance teaching is embedded in schools curriculum
- A desire to develop better methods to critique each others' work, improved CPD opportunities and mentoring
- More access to and programming of international work
- Desire to learn to market, promote, talk about, and celebrate dance in new and more effective ways

In the following sections 2,3 and 4, I have selected quotes directly from the workshops to demonstrate direct evidence of my conclusions above relating to aspirations, strengths and weaknesses. In section 5, I have presented some suggestions for early action, distilled from the workshops, and from my knowledge of other work that Creative Scotland and others are already doing. Text in italics represents direct quotes from the participants in the workshops.

I was not able to address "assets" in the larger sessions because of numbers and time. Where it looks like notes are sparse this is only because note taking by participants was waylaid by strong discussion – it is not a sign of a lack of ideas. The two-dimension text will not do justice to the participants and to dance.

"We want Scotland to be the major international centre for showcasing and making dance"

"I am taking away a shared enthusiasm and determination for change and a way forward for dance sector in Scotland"

"I love dance because it is consistently about innovation, changing, explorative, playful and experimental"

"Dancers cant hide anything – musicians can hide in a band, actors cant sleepwalk through performances – dancers cant hide."

"It was great to hear everyone's views and to talk about issues strategically – it felt like people were in this together and have similar aspirations and issues – the conversations also gave me some ideas to improve my practice which I will start immediately"

"I will take away a number of new perspectives but also a sense that a number of key areas of for development and focus have been identified such as: education, quality teaching/accreditation, and learning from the Feis model!"

"I hope CS can bring this optimism and commitment together to help programmers, dance artists and companies make more work that thrills and inspires audiences"

"Please listen carefully to the clear and repeated points raised and keep the sector involved in the process and informed of the timeframe for the review conclusions"

2. Overall Aspirations for the sector

As stated above, participants wanted Scotland to develop the quality of work produced in the country, the quality of work seen in the country (including especially international work), the quality of training at all levels of the sector, more geographic spread, and a sector led ability to critique work in an intelligent and healthy way. The following are all excerpts quoted from the participants:

a. Shared Vision about and for dance

- *For Scottish dance to be regarded as best in the world for quality*
- *I would love to see the Scottish dance community given a place of respect on the global stage and for Scotland to be a recognized vibrant, inspiring place dance makers came to work and create*
- *Dance recognized art form equal to other art forms*
- *More respect for what dance can do- how it enriches*
- *Ambitious work that speaks to people and goes beyond Scottish and UK borders – work that translates*
- *Everybody dancing – doing, enjoying, understanding*
- *Create a supportive environment for artist to engage with audiences and other arts practitioners*
- *Dance embodied in the curriculum for excellence*
- *Dance recognized as valuable and viable career*
- *The health of each strand of the sector needs to be important to all of us – freelance/educators/audience members/performers/technicians, etc*
- *It's a no brainer how dance makes the world a better place, inside and out, and dancers who work in this sector are the gatekeepers of that and usually show compassion and patience and bring joy to peoples lives. They are heroes.*
- *To increase the number of dance performances in venues*
- *Achieve a cultural shift –in local authorities, funding frameworks and quality of people doing this work together*

b. Embrace change and take responsibility for being part of that change

- *We need to connect more to the social enterprise culture, to become less depending on public subsidy*
- *We can share assets and resources more effectively*
- *We could explore unrelated income streams*
- *Work in partnership more – share assets, resources, risks, expertise*
- *We need to demonstrate the value of what we do better*
- *We need to be more imaginative generally, including about audience development*
- *We can use the resources we have for alternative purposes – and use this to generate new audiences for core purposes*

- *This will require a shift in thinking and we will need to allocate resources to address the issues:
this will unlock otherwise unlikely ideas and relationships*
- *I plan to use crowd sourcing, legacies and private sponsorship*
- *I plan to think more collectively about dance in the north east and provide resources and support*
- *We need to get into the idea of production from the roots up-and invest in talented production staff and theatre time.*
- *I want to talk to audiences more than just other organizations!*
- *From today I will put our resources and energy fully behind our touring/producing/research programme*
- *[I will] keep fighting for more resources for dance – it is non-competitive, creative, physical which more valuable than other divisive physical activities*

c. Shared sense that the dance world is diverse and inclusive

- *It is so diverse – I love the excitement of it – the use of music, the development of a dance sector is exciting*
- *It creates new and diverse audiences*
- *Dance is present, exciting, multicultural and challenging*
- *I love working with older people which I'm doing now and because they've got so much to give – they've got to the point where they've lost their reserve and they have all that experience. They are little understood as a generation.*
- *Variety breadth, and depth of style, intergeneration work – begins at a young age*
- *I love seeing young people enjoy dance and acting as a role model of young boys*
- *I love dance and want to make it available to as many people as possible*
- *[I want to] create a centre that people access to dance regardless of age, ability, training, background and style of dance*
- *Participation at all levels*
- *V inclusive sector*

d. Shared sense that the key issues that need to be addressed to develop the quality, diversity, participation and excitement that dance in Scotland could achieve within the next 10 years

- *International programming*
- *Rural touring*
- *We need honest critical response*
- *[I am concerned about] the general health and wellbeing among dance artists – roles and changing demands relating directly to issues of funding and targeted outcomes, etc*
- *The quality of the development of work/teaching of dance in the Highlands is not always good, let alone excellent*
- *[I am concerned about] regular, professional, high quality work being produced in Scotland, the Highlands and the north east*

- *Convert participation in dance into audience for professional dance attendance*
- *To encourage people over 50 to feel confident enough to enjoy dance*
- *More dance promotion and programming*
- *World Class training and education eg GSA*
- *Making it cool to dance – (like the non-smoking campaign – 20 years)*
- *Galvanise and use the expertise of the sector as a selling point*
- *Repositioning dance as a vibrant and exciting cultural experience*
- *Dance artists in all local authorities across Scotland*
- *We need to develop more collaborative models for engagement*
- *We need to build our data resource more carefully*
- *Work on an impact analysis that is quantitative and qualitative*
- *Greater cross-disciplinary connections*
- *More transparent funding process moderated by external dance specialists*
- *Heartening how much people are thinking along the same lines*

e. A shared sense that dance has something special to offer Scotland, and what that 'special' thing is.

- *Its about non-verbal communications*
- *It is rooted in social cultures*
- *It is immediate and direct*
- *It is accessible to all*
- *Ageless*
- *It is physically demanding – especially as a profession*
- *I believe passionately that dance is a social thing and is good for the mind and for the body*
- *If I don't dance I get fat, miserable and ill*
- *Dance is a medium of inclusivity and accessibility*
- *I feel dance is inside me and it need to come out. If it doesn't I get miserable so I've made it part of my life and I want to be able to share it with other people.*
- *I love working with older people which I'm doing now and because they've got so much to give – they've got to the point where they've lost their reserve and they have all that experience. They are little understood as a generation.*
- *Dance is inspiring, open-minded, adventurous*
- *I love being around dancers – all performing artists but dancers in particular. Dancers cant hide anything – musicians can hide in a band, actors cant sleepwalk through performances – dancers cant hide.*
- *Getting people to see what their bodies are capable of and when they realize they can dance*
- *It bridges culture and sport*
- *Makes sport and physical activity more interesting*
- *Getting people to see what their bodies are capable of and when they realize they can dance*

- *I am passionate about dance and the body – it is a tool for artistic expression and communication: I love it!*
- *Dance has significantly reduced health inequalities and teenage pregnancies in Scotland*
- *NHS make dance a priority – preventative medicine*

3. Acknowledged Strengths

- *Level of commitment and discipline of practitioners*
- *Genuinely contemporary and sexy!*
- *In Scotland, I feel there is a greater generosity than perhaps in some other places – generally, when the work is at its most excellent, I have a wonderful sense of connectedness that transcends language*
- *There are so many articulate and clever individuals in the dance sector – that is what I will take away from today*
- *Sense of people really caring and being passionate about it*
- *Open sector and feels networked/permeable*
- *Very approachable and inspiring people*
- *The will, care, talent, and quality of thinking that exists in Scotland to make for a wonderful, vibrant nation with dances ‘naturally’*
- *Heartening how much people are thinking along the same lines*
- *Sense of community when it works, the ability to bring abstract or obscure; tough or delicate concepts into the space (theatre, room etc etc) using movement. They can as a sector also have a great sense of play and humanity.*
- *Like that it is rooted in the physical fitness and self-expression*
- *Ability to communicate beyond language*
- *Love the crossover with theatre – dance very open to working across disciplines*
- *Ability to cross age barriers*
- *Exciting practitioners*
- *Scale and ambition in the rest of UK and international work – connecting with exciting energy*
- *There is an awareness that comes with people working with an embodied practice. The dance sector can be stewards for that within wider society. It is an important knowledge to share.*
- *I love the fact that dance is traditional but can coexist with new modern practice – in Scotland it feels very dynamic and that things are changing*
- *I love the ability to resonate profoundly with so many different types of people – it is a great leveler*
- *Love the variety – from major productions to smaller activity – a lot of ground level work is going on*
- *Dance is open to everyone, just need empty space and music*
- *Integrity, and intellectual rigour*
- *Actually collaborative*

- *It is the ultimate multi-artform – music/dance/theatre/design – it is adventurous and can push boundaries*
- *Love the discipline*

4. Acknowledged Weaknesses

- *There is no PGCE for dance*
- *In comparison to Europe/rest of the world, our standards are much lower and people are often just not good enough at what they do*
- *Training of young people in some of the colleges seems poor and end of year show-cases are rarely created to showcase specific talented individuals but are more about group performances and can be very poor*
- *Underfunded, leading to closed mindedness, fear leading to lack of openness and critique*
- *Sector is not fussy or ambitious enough to achieve highest quality*
- *[Sector is]Not fighting for the cause enough*
- *Poor marketing – using language and images that connect with audiences*
- *Audience development is not right yet*
- *Feel like you are taking a risk whenever you programme dance*
- *It is a hidden artform – behind closed doors*
- *More programmers with a dance background – transition into venue management*
- *Patchiness of provision across the country – central belt focus*
- *Clique-y – unintentional snobbery among dancers at professional level – barriers come up – snobbery between professionals across genres – UK wide*
- *Not enough inclusivity for older people – at least I don't know about it*
- *There is a lack of rigour and experimentation – it can be too safe*
- *Programming dance is expensive*
- *Difficult to engage audiences*
- *lack of interest in doing daily class- no real discipline in training*
- *Lack of opportunity to see work, particularly internationally*
- *Lack of producing skills in the sector*
- *Lack of venues engaging with dance*
- *No European Tramway dance program*
- *No New Territories International dance program*

5. Requests to Creative Scotland from the Sector

- *Please don't fudge this review*
- *Please focus on targeted, sustained investment, not short-term initiatives*
- *Don't fund poor quality work*
- *Please listen carefully to the clear and repeated points raised and keep the sector involved in the process and informed of the timeframe for the review conclusions*
- *Have a policy on rates of pay and don't support organizations who don't meet it*
- *Please take on board the ideas from the day and look at funding that enables longer term planning for dance*

- *It would be helpful to have quicker turn around of funding applications*
- *Please be brave and listen to what Scottish arts needs*
- *Please help us network better and understand what each other are doing*
- *Please explore options for rural touring*
- *Listen*

6. Some Suggested Ideas for an immediate response to the sector

Creative Scotland and the Steering Group will have many other ideas. These are distilled from the workshops and made manageable and simple objectives for the next 6 months to demonstrate that CS have listened and taken action, therefore building trust and generating excitement and motivation.

A. CS-led Round Table on Dance in Education

An idea generated at the last Steering Group meeting that the Chair of Creative Scotland and the Dance Review to bring together all those responsible for Curriculum for Excellence, including ministers and civil servants, and senior educators in Scotland (private sector, schools, higher and further education) to a round table to discuss PGSE in Dance and investment in quality dance training in Scotland

B. Design and implement series of 6 workshops around the country on Peer to Peer critical response (could be across artform sectors)

Make the most of Liz Lehrman's visit in the Autumn 2012 and flesh out her discussions with Ruth Little (dance/theatre dramaturg and producer of Sea Change for Cape Farewell in Scottish Islands) and Elizabeth Reeder (Edinburgh based writer), add the voice of Kate McGrath at Fuel Theatre (producer who has written and spoken about critical feedback and how to do it) and design a series of workshops for artists, producers and programmers around critical response theory

C. Create a collaborative business model workshop around the following:

- Creating a new model dance company for development of emerging choreographic talent
- New website for the whole dance sector in Scotland – networking, information, bartering
- Consortium for Scottish dance programmers

D. Appoint a Dance Laureate (or equivalent)

To work across other CS programmes to pilot dance programmes, eg Elderly Festival/Imagine/other festivals/AmbITion/CEO and Starter for 6/BBC/NESTA/model Feis/attend traditional dance events, work with private sector and public sector, etc. [Janet Smith's name was also mentioned so many times as an inspiration!]

E. Rural Touring

Commission a short feasibility study for a capital application for a couple of sets of transportable rural touring kit for hire/barter; including a bit of research in some of the Scandinavian rural touring models.

F. Create a small programme for a series of innovative dance-related public art commissions

Flashmobs, films, site-specific work, cross-artform collaborations, socially engaged work- 3-4 a year, bespoke communication plans, great selection panel, geographically spread, virally communicated

7. Conclusion

Michael Clark was among many of the wonderful dance artists mentioned in the review as inspirations. He is worthy of particular mention though because he and his work is symbolic of so many of the aspirations of the review truly engages across all artforms – music, fashion, magic, exhilaration, and the fact that he is a world class dance artists from the North East of Scotland who attracts audiences to dance from all walks of life. Mark Cousins, one of the foremost film commentators and filmmakers in Scotland, chose to write as he did on twitter was very exciting to see and is symbolic of the place that dance has been building in recent years and the value that it is starting to have in the wider cultural context.

Having aspirations is one thing: recognizing the amount of work, dedication, discipline and possibility even loss, that it will take to get there, is another. It was reassuring to see so much common ground across the workshop and to see realistic sense of strengths and weaknesses. The issue of quality in all areas of our work in dance is going to be critical for our future success. Creative Scotland's leadership in taking on all of these issues and in making clear but tough decisions is going to be key and invaluable. I hope, though, that this process has encouraged participants to feel and be empowered to take initiative themselves and in their organizations, and not be solely dependant on CS to take action and leadership.

The engagement with, and the hunger from, these workshops for making, teaching and experiencing dance of world-class quality was impressive, and there are a remarkable group of people in Scotland working in dance at the moment. It is important to ensure that this process stokes those flames, and encourages the best of those people to continue to work towards these stated aspirations. The Steering Group and Creative Scotland will have other perspectives and agenda, but a few early strategic, easy and inexpensive decisions will help continue trust and aspiration that this process has generated.

I hope that the Steering Group finds this material useful to their discussions and to the final Dance Sector Review Report.

Finally, I would like to thank Creative Scotland and Anita Clark in particular, for their efficient and trusting support for the arrangements and getting people to take time to attend the workshops. It has renewed my own energy and passion for the sector in Scotland, and given me a greater understanding to continue to add my own contribution to the next 10 years of achievement for dance in Scotland.

**Roanne Dods
June 2012**

Dance Review Workshops

1. Setting the scene

The review – what is happening and who is involved – this bit is part of a bigger Creative Scotland key areas of development

There is a separate Steering Group

Your chance to say things that need to be said about the future of dance

Working in groups, with lots of post-its

My background in dance –

2. Introductions

3. The things you want to make sure that we address but think that we might avoid – one post-it

4. Handout 1 in pairs 30 minutes

Why are you doing what you are doing?

What do you love about the dance sector? Generally and in Scotland in particular

What do you not like about the dance sector? Generally and in Scotland

What would you like to achieve in your work?

What three things would support you being able to achieve that aspiration?

Who or what in the sector inspires you?

What motivates you to take action/make changes – inspiration, desperation, decisions from policy/funders, artistic drive, moral passion?

5. Handout 2 Future thinking: 2017/2022 Small groups then presentation to the plenary

In groups of 5, work on your aspirations for the dance sector in 5 and 10 years. Be aspirational but realistic

Think about what you would like to be doing

What attitudes, culture and values you would be working with

Thinking about what ages and what is new and how you replenish and enrich these

Future trends for artists

5 years 2017

10 years 2022

6. Different groups working on the following questions Plenary Feedback

How do we build on these developments to improve the quality of work we show?

How do we support emerging and established practitioners in the sector?

How do we make the most of new technology to reach new audiences

How do we make more of what we have while the economic climate may not offer more money into the system?

How do we integrate private, not-for-profit and new approaches to social/cultural enterprise to make more of what we have?

7. What happens next

This is feeding into the overall review. Working towards end of July timescale to report to Creative Scotland board

8. Finally

What will you take away from today?

What would you like to ask of Creative Scotland

[In some of the smaller groups I had people identifying assets now and future – unfortunately this wasn't always possible due to time.]

Handout 1:

1. Why are you doing what you are doing with dance?
2. What do you love about the dance sector? Generally and in Scotland in particular
3. What do you not like about the dance sector? Generally and in Scotland
4. What would you like to achieve in your work with dance?
5. What three things would support you being able to achieve that aspiration?
6. Who or what in the dance world inspires you?

Handout 2:

Where would you like/love the dance sector be in 10 years time, in the context of programming?

Set it out in

1. Vision Statements
2. Values
3. What will challenge/impede this vision
4. What will support/develop this vision

-Be aspirational but realistic

- Address challenges and issues positively

-think personally as well as systemically

-Thinking about what will age (buildings/you/companies lifecycles) and what is new and how you replenish and enrich these

-consider current and future trends for artists, dancers and practitioners

10 years

2022

Handout 3:

1. How do we build on our assets and aspirations to improve the quality of work we show?
2. How do we support emerging and established practitioners ?
3. How do we make the most of new technology to reach new audiences?
4. What things could we do to make more of our resources while the economic climate

may not offer more money into the system?

5. How might we integrate private dance organisations, and the funded dance sector to make more of what we have for dance?