



# Reshaping the Landscape: A Pathway to Professional Dance Training of International Standing in Ireland

THE ARTS COUNCIL DANCE AND EDUCATION REPORT

Dr Jenny Roche, June 2016

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## PREFACE

There is still no formal pathway in Ireland that enables dancers to train to a high-level of technique and artistry demanded by today's international standards. Past research has evidenced that the net result of this gap in Ireland's formal dance education system is that many students who wish to train professionally leave every year to take up places at schools and colleges outside the country. This shortcoming has had a particularly negative effect upon the development of ballet and contemporary dance practices in Ireland and has hindered their growth considerably.

This issue has been acknowledged and discussed in a number of significant Arts Council reports on professional dance education in Ireland spanning the last thirty-years, including: Peter Brinson, *The Dancer and the Dance* (1985); Leatherdale and Todd, *Shall We Dance?* (1998); Yannick Marzin, *A Professional Dance Curriculum for Ireland* (2003); and Victoria O'Brien, *Step Up: a Programme for Pre-Professional Contemporary Dance in Ireland* (2010); and most recently, *Ballet Policy Review* (2013).

Due to the nature of its remit, the Arts Council cannot play a direct role in the development of formal third level education. The Arts Council's focus on this issue arises from the systemic role that dance education plays in the formation and development of both professional and community based dance practice. Past reports have provided a firm ground for advocacy, as they demonstrate that Arts Council policy development will continue to be hindered by the absence of this essential component.

This report is contextualised within the recent development of a ten-year strategy published in 2016 under the framework Making Great Art Work. By commissioning a new study on dance education the Arts Council is keeping the issue of formal dance training to the fore. Additionally, and through this report, the Arts Council is actively seeking to find solutions to improve access to advanced professional training and to ensure that the highest international standards of dance education are made available in Ireland for the benefit of a fully integrated ecology of dance.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background to dance and education in Ireland**

This report discusses current provision and potential future developments for professional level training in dance in Ireland. The document is informed by and builds on previous Arts Council reports into this area (Brinson 1985; Leatherdale and Todd 1998; Marzin 2003; O'Brien 2010; McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013). While, over the years, there have been a number of positive initiatives to support training possibilities for students outside of the country and to help these students reconnect with dance networks in Ireland, there has not been a focused initiative to establish a professional training programme with the institutional support required to compete at an international level. Therefore, for dancers in Ireland, the decision to follow a career in dance means that they must travel abroad to receive professional level training at an established dance conservatory. This gap in education is anomalous among developed countries and has had a negative impact on the development of the art form more generally.

#### **Arts Council's role and history of advocacy**

While formal education is beyond the remit of the Arts Council, the organisation has taken a lead role in advocating for professional level training through commissioning a number of reports that have explored this topic as a central issue and that have discussed its impact on the broader development of dance in Ireland (Brinson 1985; Leatherdale and Todd 1998; Marzin 2003; O'Brien 2010; McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013). From 1977 to 2002, through competitive auditions the Arts Council provided bursaries towards costs of students training abroad. Many of these students who received funding at this crucial juncture in their career development went on to have exceptional careers in both ballet and contemporary dance. While many remained abroad for the majority of their career, equally, a number have made significant contributions to the development of dance as an art form in Ireland. Although beneficial, such programmes cannot be intended as a substitute for formal third-level education.

#### **Aims and scope of the review**

Taking into account the background and historical context outlined above, the aim of this report, therefore, is to inform and help advance pathways for professional dance training in Ireland as well as broader Arts Council policy in the area. This core aim is broken down into the following objectives:

- To provide a factual overview of the existing provision for dance education in Ireland (post-leaving certificate and third level programmes)
- To identify the scale and range of needs of students who currently pursue post-leaving certificate and third level dance training in Ireland
- To pinpoint the key-components that are fundamental to the delivery of a third level dance programme of international standing

- To propose and discuss an educational model, which would be complementary to the synergies of the Irish dance sector, while remaining relevant and competitive at an international level
- To investigate the potential for the establishment of a high profile BA in Dance as part of the programmes offered by existing third level organisations
- To explore the possibility of the establishing a National Academy of Dance
- To identify potential world-class external partners who would help to sustain the feasibility of such initiative at high international standards

### **Methodology and structure of the review**

The review comprised of desk research, interviews with key individuals from the fields of dance training, third level performing arts education and the professional dance sector in Ireland. Representatives of Dance Foundation Courses, Youth Dance Companies and Dance Courses in Colleges of Further Education were asked to complete surveys and given the option to contribute comments. The contributors and interviewees are listed in the appendix.

## **CHAPTER 1: Overview of the current landscape**

### **1.1 Existing provision and pathways**

On review of the landscape and from consultation with representatives of key educational and professional organisations, it is clear that Ireland currently does not provide professional level training in dance to an international standard. Indeed, current education providers do not claim to offer this standard of training and in the absence of provision in Ireland, focus instead on creating viable and meaningful pathways for students to attend other institutions abroad.

Existing provision in Ireland and current pathways towards professional training are provided by foundation courses, private dance schools and youth dance companies. These organisations all play a role in supporting students to undertake further professional level training abroad. Recent developments in the Higher Education sector include the closure of the BA (Hons) in Dance at the University of Ulster and plans for redesigning undergraduate degrees at the University of Limerick where there currently exists a BA (Hons) in Voice and Dance, to include a contemporary dance specific BA stream. Further areas exist for potential development in dance provision in the longer term at National University of Ireland (Galway) and Dublin Institute of Technology (Conservatory of Music and Drama).

### **1.2 Scale and range of needs at a national level**

This is a particularly challenging time for young Irish people wanting to train professionally in dance abroad. Financial factors often represent the main barrier, however this is compounded by other factors, such as the lack of parents' recognition of dance as a viable career, the potential emotional immaturity of young students living alone abroad and the lack of significant funding pathways to support living costs or fees. The requirement for talented dance students to travel abroad to continue training has impacted on the quality of dance work being produced in Ireland. The

dance community has acknowledged the need for well-trained Irish based dancers to increase the quality of dance productions and to build a more dynamic and competitive dance culture. Although initiatives such as the Step Up Dance Project currently help Irish graduates from international institutions to reconnect with the national professional dance sector, many dancers who train abroad stay abroad and therefore contribute to a continuous bleeding of expertise and skills to the benefit of other international dance sectors

### **1.3 Numbers of students travelling abroad**

It is estimated that from 2012 to 2014, out of approximately 71 graduates from pre-vocational training courses in Ireland, 36 continued training at institutions abroad. There are no collated figures on numbers of students graduating from private dance schools, nor clear figures on the overlap between foundation courses, private dance schools and youth dance companies. This figure represents a decline of approximately 30% since O'Brien's report on these figures in 2010. This reflects the comments from the surveys that identified this as an increasingly difficult period for Irish dance students to finance training abroad. This has resulted in students going to cheaper, less prestigious schools or not auditioning at all in the knowledge that even if successful they will not be able to finance their studies. In spite of this, the profile of dance conservatories at which Irish students gain places through competitive auditions continue to be of a high standard in general. This indicates that there are many talented dance students graduating from pre-vocational training in Ireland on an annual basis with the potential to embark on a career in dance at an international level. Furthermore, this does not account for the approximately 35 students annually who may have the ability to enter the profession but do not pursue this avenue because of the various obstacles outlined above.

## **CHAPTER 2: Key components for a third-level dance-training course**

### **2.1 International trends in training**

Professional dance training has been influenced by global shifts in the employment market. Internationally, dance is recognised as a viable career choice within the creative economy, with professional dance training developing a range of transferrable skills that enable graduates to enter creative, performance, research and teaching careers. Accredited qualifications are essential and thus, the majority of successful international dance training programmes award a BA degree. Attaining a recognised qualification is important in the creative arts, as most professionals will have a 'portfolio career' (Bamford et al 2013), which in dance often requires retraining for another career in early mid-life. In order to be competitive in the employment market, dance graduates are expected to have high-level technical dance abilities, critical thinking skills, creative expertise and an entrepreneurial focus. Therefore, training should be multi-faceted, diverse, industry-focused, learner-centred and develop the autonomous outlook of the student.

### **2.2 Course subjects - example of course subjects**

Based on a scan of a range of current performer training programmes, the following outline of course subjects is offered as guidance. Priority has been given to practical studio work, augmented by subjects that contextualise this practical learning through developing critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurial acuity and knowledge of anatomy and kinesiology:

Contemporary Dance, Ballet, Other dance genres (such as Irish traditional dance or African dance), Partnering, Choreography, Performances, Anatomy and kinesiology, Complementary Training, Improvisation, Contextualisation of Dance (theoretical modules) and Entrepreneurship.

### **2.3 Resources and facilities required**

Dance is a resource intensive area of practice. High standard facilities are an essential component for the physical safety of dancers and for the expression of the technical skills involved. The quality of dance teachers equally contributes to the successful formation of the student. The selection of teachers should therefore be based on high competitive standards, to align with international norms. Within a training programme, it is essential to have permanent staff with high-level dance expertise to coordinate the design and delivery of curriculum alongside teaching, but equally important to employ high quality dance teachers with strong industry experience on a part-time or casual basis. Appropriate studio spaces are essential for any dance training programme to ensure safe dance practice and high quality training. To run a three-year BA programme requires at the minimum, three medium-sized to large dance studios for exclusive use by the programme.

## **CHAPTER 3: Potential for the establishment of a BA in Dance**

### **3.1 Dance within Higher Education in Ireland**

The economic commodification of the creative and performing arts has established a stronger case for the value of arts in society through clustering them under the umbrella of the Creative Industries. Thus, developments in this area are likely to significantly shift education and training patterns for dance in the coming decades within the ‘knowledge economy’ (Bullen, Robb and Kenway 2004, 6). The *Dublin Creative Arts Review* calls for consolidation and clarification of educational pathways for learners through developing ‘vertical and horizontal partnerships between educational providers and cultural institutions’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 2).

Third level institutions are allocated funding by the HEA Recurrent Grant Allocation Model and studio based teaching receives 1.3 of the allocation (Buckley 2010, 22). Universities have autonomy to distribute this funding across programmes, which is important for a resource intensive subject, such as dance. The advantages of situating a professional level training programme within a university model are manifold. However, it is vital that dance industry standards are at the centre of the design of any proposed BA programme.

### **3.2 Establishing a National Academy of Dance in Ireland**

The LIR Academy and the Royal Irish Academy of Music are successful models that could be used as templates for a similar initiative in dance. However, in order to develop a national academy of dance in Ireland, there would need to be a pre-existing established dance conservatoire with a proven track record capable of taking that next step. Such an organisation would need the necessary resources to expand current programmes and bring them into line with professional level training at international standing. In the current landscape, there is no such institution, so one would have to be established and become accredited over time in order to access funding as part of the HEA’s National Qualifications Framework and to attract students who recognise the necessity of holding a primary degree. There is scope for initiatives that bring

together expertise, resources and institutional accreditation through organisations such as Dance Ireland. However, based on its focus on consolidation at the time of writing this report, it is possible that the Department of Education or HEA might not prioritise the development of a new national academy of dance. An exception may be where philanthropic funds could be accessed to establish a national dance academy as in the case of the LIR academy.

### **3.3 Key considerations for developments in this area**

International benchmarking is essential in establishing a training programme of world-class quality and standing in Ireland. McGrath (2013) suggests liaising with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in order to develop ‘a quality control strategy for formal dance training in Ireland’. Although cases could be made for either a Dublin-based or regional-based course, existing infrastructure and institutional support would be of primary importance in determining the location of the course. The HEA is unlikely to support more than one professional dance training course in Ireland due to the relatively modest demand compared to other subjects. Marketing, publicity and building networks with existing dance resource organisations are key factors in establishing a course with a national profile.

### **3.4 Positioning professional training in the dance ecology of Ireland**

In terms of a viable national ecology for dance in Ireland, many of the essential elements are in place to produce a strong and vibrant sector<sup>1</sup> and it can therefore be surmised that the lack of professional level training is the weak link in the chain of professionalization. It is recommended that any developments in this area include an inclusive and consultative approach that engages with the dance community. This has proven successful for theatre in the development of the LIR Academy and should ensure ‘buy-in’ by the dance sector so that the training programme enables students to move successfully from pre-vocational training into fulltime professional training and following graduation, to take a place within the national and/or international dance sector.

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<sup>1</sup> See section 3.4.1 for a summary of the dance ecology in Ireland.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to dance and education in Ireland

This report discusses current provision and potential future developments for professional level training in dance in Ireland. Its findings build on previous Arts Council reports that have discussed professional dance training (Brinson 1985; Leatherdale and Todd 1998; Marzin 2003; O'Brien 2010; McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013). The consensus view accumulated over these years and still prevalent within the dance community at large is that the lack of institutionally supported professional level dance training represents a major obstacle to the development and stabilisation of the art form in Ireland. For dancers in Ireland the decision to follow a career in dance means that they must travel abroad to receive professional level training at an established dance conservatory. While there are certain advantages afforded by this experience in terms of broadening personal perspectives, equally, this situation causes emerging dance professionals to disconnect from the dance ecology in Ireland. Once their training is complete, this makes it particularly challenging for graduates to re-enter and replenish the creative landscape in Ireland. While there have been various positive initiatives to support training possibilities for students outside of the country and to help them reconnect as graduates with dance networks in Ireland, there has not been a focused initiative to establish a professional training programme with the institutional support required to compete at an international level.

### Arts Council's role and history of advocacy

The Arts Council has taken a lead role in advocating for professional level training through commissioning a number of reports that have explored this topic as a central issue and that have discussed its impact on the broader development of dance in Ireland. The first such report, *The Dancer and the Dance: Developing Theatre Dance in Ireland* by Peter Brinson (1985) acknowledged the need for the development of an indigenous dance identity that would represent the specific cultural identity of Ireland. While dance operates in an international and globalised arena, different countries have different stylistic trends that are representative of their cultural identity and differences in approaches to dance training is one mechanism that allows for the formation of these unique cultural expressions. Brinson (1985) noted 'the strong influence of British dance education practices and British vocational training' on the dance sector of that time and he advocated for strategic planning 'to nourish choreographic creation and to train dancers and dance teachers in Ireland to produce truly Irish forms of theatre dance'.

In 1977 the Arts Council awarded its first bursary for a dancer to undertake full-time training in London. Katherine Lewis<sup>2</sup>, who was sixteen at the time, received £800 to take up a place at the Royal Ballet School in London (The Arts Council 1978). Throughout subsequent years, this support was for students predominantly to travel abroad to train, although some students received funding to undertake full-time training with the Irish National Ballet and Dublin City Ballet in the 1980s. Many of these students who received funding at this crucial juncture in their career

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<sup>2</sup> Katherine Lewis is the current Artistic Director of Irish National Youth Ballet.

development went on to have exceptional careers in both ballet and contemporary dance. While several remained abroad for the majority of their career, equally, a number of those trained abroad have made significant contributions to the development of dance as an art form in Ireland.

In the Arts Plan 2002 to 2006, the Arts Council announced that it would begin phasing out support for undergraduate training<sup>3</sup> with a focus on persuading education authorities to provide undergraduate dance training and advocating for ‘comprehensive professional training in dance’ (The Arts Council 2002, 28). At that time, a policy document entitled *The Participation of Young People in the Arts in Ireland* (Coughlan 2002, 15) outlined that ‘there are no clear vocational training or career development paths in Ireland for young dancers. Most have to emigrate...[raising] serious issues regarding equitable access not only to participation in...dance for its own sake but also to the opportunity for those with ability to pursue professional careers as...dancers’. Subsequently, the council commissioned Yannick Marzin (2003) to develop a professional dance curriculum, which encompassed ballet and contemporary dance in line with international training standards. While initiatives that have included dance have existed, such as the Special Committee on the Arts and Education and The Step Up Dance Project, which creates employment opportunities for recently trained dancers, no further movement towards implementation of a professional level training programme has occurred through the Arts Council. It should be noted that the recent *Ballet Policy Review* (McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013) outlines a model for a BA in Ballet with contemporary dance as a major component and while it aligns with the curriculum as laid out by Marzin (2003) it has encompassed more recent international trends that align professional training with the awarding of an undergraduate degree.

### **Aims and scope of the review**

Taking into account the background and historical context outlined above, the aim of this report, therefore, is to inform and help advance pathways for professional dance training in Ireland as well as broader Arts Council policy in the area. This core aim is broken down into the following objectives:

- To provide an objective overview of the existing provision for dance education in Ireland (post-leaving certificate and third level programmes)
- To identify the scale and range of needs of students who currently pursue post-leaving certificate and third level dance training in Ireland. This would include determining the number of students leaving Ireland to pursue third level training abroad each year
- To pinpoint the key-components that are fundamental to the delivery of a third level dance programme of international standing
- To propose and discuss an educational model, which would be complementary to the synergies of the Irish dance sector, while remaining relevant and competitive at an international level

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<sup>3</sup>Arts Council Annual Report, 2001.

- To investigate the potential for the establishment of a high profile BA in Dance as part of the programmes offered by existing third level organisations
- To explore the possibility of the establishing a National Academy of Dance (similar, for example, to the Royal Irish Academy of Music, which is in receipt of support directly from the Oireachtas)
- To identify potential world-class external partners who would help to sustain the feasibility of such initiative at high international standards

### **Methodology and structure of the review**

The review comprised of desk research, interviews with key individuals from the fields of dance training, third level performing arts education and the professional dance sector in Ireland. Representatives of Dance Foundation Courses, Youth Dance Companies and Dance Courses in Colleges of Further Education were asked to complete surveys and given the option to contribute comments. The contributors and interviewees are listed in the appendix.

The first chapter outlines the current landscape for dance training in Ireland with an overview of existing pathways for Irish students prior to and post training. It presents the numbers graduating from dance colleges in Ireland, those continuing into professional training and the profile of courses attended abroad. Chapter two explores current issues in professional dance training and different approaches to dance studies within the university. It presents a model for a professional dance -training programme with consideration of course content and resources required. Chapter three outlines the positioning of dance within Higher Education, in particular through its place in the Creative Industries. It provides background context through an outline of current policy in third level arts education in Ireland. It explores possibilities for the establishment of a National Academy of Dance alongside issues such as international benchmarking. It outlines how professional training could be positioned within a continuum of dance practice (Leatherdale and Todd 1998) and gives final recommendations for a professional dance training course in regards to location in Ireland, consultation with the sector and relationship to the dance industry. Chapter four draws the previous chapters into a conclusion by summarising the key findings of the report.

## CHAPTER 1: Overview of the current landscape

### 1.1 Existing provision and pathways

On review of the landscape and from consultation with representatives of key educational and professional organisations, it is clear that Ireland currently does not provide professional level training in dance to an international standard. Indeed, current education providers do not claim to offer this standard of training and, in the absence of provision in Ireland, they focus instead on creating viable and meaningful pathways for students to attend other institutions abroad. The following section gives an overview of these current pathways and the general profile of institutions attended abroad, also estimating the number of students who pursue international training and the number of those who are unable to continue their studies due to the considerable challenges involved.

#### 1.1.1 Foundation courses

Currently, Ireland has four dance training courses formally offered through colleges of further education<sup>4</sup>. These are Sallynoggin College of Further Education (Dublin), Coláiste Stiofán Naofa (Cork), Inchicore College of Further Education (Dublin) and Bray Institute of Further Education (Wicklow). As has been outlined in the Step Up Feasibility Report (O'Brien 2010), these courses are positioned at QQI Level 5 which is Leaving Certificate Level and can be considered pre-vocational in that, on graduation, students wishing to enter the dance profession continue their training at professional conservatories abroad (O'Brien 2010). Bray Institute is the only dance course in Ireland to offer a Higher National Diploma, which allows students to undertake a one-year top up at a University to achieve a Bachelor of Arts Degree<sup>5</sup>. This pathway facilitates further education in a number of dance degree programmes in the UK. However, although some of these courses offer BA Hons. in Dance Performance, the institutions listed are not part of the consortium of schools in the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, which comprises the key professional level training schools in dance in the UK, and they do not offer professional level training.

#### 1.1.2 Private dance schools

While some students progress from one of the many private dance schools in Ireland to further training abroad, there are no collated figures on the number that take this route (McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013; O'Brien 2010). There is a cross over between private schools and youth dance companies (see 1.1.3), as one private studio teacher explained, 'most students who leave the school, go on to study in the wider university/third level system. Students who wish to pursue a career in dance are facilitated and given appropriate private coaching, or encouraged to work with one of the youth dance companies in Ireland'. One of the most significant full-time foundation courses in Ireland is the College of Dance, Dublin. Established in 1990, it plays a key role in the development of dancers at a pre-vocational level. Its alumni are amongst some of the key figures in the professional dance sector. The school offers a

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<sup>4</sup> The dance course at Belfast Metropolitan College, mentioned in The Step Up Feasibility Report, was discontinued in 2015 due to funding cuts. See Quinn (2015)

<sup>5</sup> Sourced from Bray Institute of Further Education website [Accessed 17/02/16]  
<http://www.bife.ie/p/danceadvanced>

two-year professional dance diploma, which involves an average of 30 hours training per week<sup>6</sup>. Many students from the College of Dance progress to further training in international conservatories<sup>7</sup>.

### 1.1.3 Youth Dance Companies

In recent years the youth dance sector has expanded exponentially through companies such as Irish National Youth Ballet, Dublin Youth Dance Company, and Youth Ballet West who draw together students from various private schools for performance projects. Other groups include Cois Céim's Creative Steps, Wexford Youth Dance Company and Company B. The Youth Dance festivals that take place annually, such as, the Irish Youth Dance Festival in Dun Laoghaire and NoiseMoves in Tallaght, each supported by their respective local councils, exemplify the vibrancy in this area. Youth dance companies play a key role in imparting a taste of professional experience and career guidance for young students and have become important stepping off points into professional training. Shawbrook LD has provided summer intensive programmes for many years, employing established Irish and international choreographers and teachers to work with the students which are drawn from other ballet schools around Ireland. With a commitment to exposing young students to the best of Irish and international standards in teaching and choreography, these youth dance organisations have had a vital role to play in establishing standards and maintaining pathways for potential careers in dance.

### 1.1.4 Undergraduate dance degrees

Since the discontinuation of the BA (Hons) in Dance at the University of Ulster in 2015, there is currently only one undergraduate degree with dance as a major component in the island of Ireland. This is the BA (Hons) Voice and Dance at the University of Limerick (UL). Contemporary dance has had a strong presence at UL since the mid 1980s when Mary Nunan became dancer in residence and subsequently formed Daghda Dance Company, a professional company with a strong education remit, which operated out of the university. The development of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance in 1994 led to the formation of the first MA in Dance Performance (Contemporary) in Ireland and this full-time practice-based course is currently run out of UL's high quality, custom-built dance studios in Limerick. Although the BA Voice and Dance course has a number of dance modules and allows students to specialise in dance, this course is moving towards the provision of sufficient practical contact hours for specialised dance training, as well as developing a greater focus on contemporary dance at professional level. This is part of a major redesign of the university's BA offerings to be instigated in September 2017, in line with an infrastructural development plan to create more studio space to accommodate the specific facilities required for such a dance intensive programme<sup>8</sup>.

Although there are no other dance degree programmes in Ireland, there are a number of performing arts training programmes of relevance to this study. For example, the Conservatory of Music and Drama at Dublin Institute of Technology has

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<sup>6</sup> Information from College of Dance website [Accessed 22/02/16]  
<http://www.collegeofdance.com>

<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing the report, the long-term Artistic Director of the College of Dance, Joanna Banks had just stepped down from her role, with no replacement named as yet.

<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence with Sandra Joyce, director of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at UL.

undergraduate degrees in music and theatre and has plans to extend this to incorporate dance programmes as part of its strategic development. Where previously lack of proper facilities have impeded developments in this area, the conservatory's planned move in 2018 to its Grangegorman campus in Dublin 7 which houses a large dance studio and potential for further building may allow for the possibility of such expansion<sup>9</sup>. The National University of Ireland, Galway, runs an undergraduate degree in Drama, which includes some dance classes taught by choreographer Rachel Parry, as well as occasional events and conferences, which are facilitated by dancer in residence for Galway, Rionach Ní Néill, and the university has plans to develop dance modules in the coming years. There has been recent infrastructural development on its Galway campus, including a one hundred and twenty seat theatre and three rehearsal rooms due to open in autumn 2016, which would allow more dance engagement<sup>10</sup>.

## 1.2 Scale and range of needs at a national level

### 1.2.1 Students needs

According to feedback from dance educators in Ireland, this is a particularly challenging time for young Irish people wanting to train professionally to become dancers. Key impediments that have been outlined include high fees, costs of living abroad, emotional maturity of students to live abroad, lack of funding support from Ireland, lack of support from parents to pursue a career in dance, networks and relationships with the professional dance sector in Ireland and lack of job opportunities to bring trained dancers back to Ireland. The yearly tuition fees of a BA in Dance at London Contemporary Dance School in 2015/2016 are £9,000 (sterling). Although coming from a EU member country tuition fee loans are available to Irish students, living costs are high in a major city such as London and students in full-time training have limited capacity to support themselves financially through part-time work due to the amount of contact hours required in dance training. As mentioned earlier, the Arts Council no longer provides competitive bursaries to support training abroad. Therefore, students need to draw on support from family to fund living expenses as well as fees in many contexts. In one of the questionnaire responses, it was stated that this situation has caused 'many of the best Irish dance students to accept places in less prestigious academies especially outside of London or abandon their training altogether'. Another comment explains how many students 'have decided not to audition abroad in the full knowledge that, even if a place is gained they will not be able to finance the course'.

As dance is often regarded as not a viable career choice in Ireland, parents can be reluctant to allow their children to embark on dance training (McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013). This situation could be attributed to the 'misplacement of dance within the education system' (it is situated under Physical Education<sup>11</sup>), where according to

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<sup>9</sup> Personal correspondence with Cliona Doris, director of the Conservatory of Music and Drama, Dublin.

<sup>10</sup> Personal correspondence with Patrick Lonergan, Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies, National University of Ireland, Galway.

<sup>11</sup> For an in-depth understanding of this issue and recommendations for developments, see Tanham, Gaye. 2015. *Dance education in Ireland: an examination of Smith-Autard's art of dance model in teacher education and the Irish primary school curriculum*. PhD Thesis: Trinity College, Dublin.

Leatherdale and Todd (1998) ‘dance is seen as an ancillary subject taken as a leisure activity or by those less academically able’. This may be further exacerbated by the lack of third-level Dance Studies courses in Ireland, where students might study dance as a research area or develop skills in teaching or community practice. Therefore, Irish students need accessible accredited dance degree courses, not only to allay parents’ concerns but also to gain a primary degree in an increasingly competitive and qualifications focused work environment. This is particularly pertinent within such an unpredictable and often short-lived career as that of the professional dancer where there is an expectation that many will need to completely retrain in mid life for a second career.

Although finances seem to be a major impediment to students continuing their training abroad, the impact of being compelled to leave Ireland to train on individual dancers should also be examined. Although the benefits of training in a highly developed and resourced dance culture, such as London is manifold, the emotional and psychological cost of living in a large city without the support of family at the ages of sixteen to eighteen can be a highly stressful experience for a young person. Leaving home at such key developmental stages is not a good fit for every young dancer. Indeed, as outlined above, ‘emotional maturity’ was one listed barrier for students, by those surveyed, in pursuing further training abroad. Therefore, leaving Ireland should not be a pre-requisite for every student embarking on this particular career path, as is currently the case.

### **1.2.2 Sector needs**

According to the Brinson (1985) report, ‘there cannot be a significant development of classical ballet or modern dance in Ireland without a national school of good quality’. This view is supported by subsequent reviews (McGrath, Parnell and O’Brien 2013; Leatherdale and Todd 1998; O’Brien 2010) and was re-iterated in the interviews and surveys conducted for this research. The lack of professional level dance training continues to impact negatively on the development of dance as an art form in Ireland. There is a strong sense from members of the dance community consulted that although the dance sector in Ireland has an exciting interdisciplinary flavour with many innovative dance artists creating work, there is a need for more well-trained Irish based dancers to increase the quality of Irish dance productions and to build a more dynamic and competitive dance culture. The belief being that if there is sufficient critical mass of good quality dancers feeding the sector it will contribute positively to the development of a strong professional dance culture in Ireland.

Ireland does not have a full—time national ballet or contemporary dance company, highly unusual for a European country. There are no repertory based contemporary dance companies and contracts are short-term and can be scarce. Many of those consulted stressed the importance of high quality training on a par with training abroad in order to maintain pathways to the international dance profession. This is so that dancers from Ireland have career mobility in light of the small number of available positions in dance companies in Ireland and the lack of on-going full time contracts available to Irish based dancers. Although it could be argued that increasing the number of dancers for a small numbers of jobs would be detrimental to the sector, the lack of competition has been identified as an impediment to professional development for dancers in that there is little incentive to maintain technical skills and fitness when not directly employed. Furthermore, the provision of government

support (through the Higher Education Authority) and institutional support (through a university or technical college) for a fully accredited, internationally benchmarked dance-training programme would endorse dance as a viable profession. This in turn would benefit the dance community in general through not only producing well-trained performers and choreographers but also, graduates who are articulate in a range of perspectives on dance practice. Transferrable skills from this training could be applied to a range of contexts that would enhance quality of practice at a community level and over time, increase appreciation of dance for audiences at a national level.

### **1.2.3 Networks from training to professional practice**

As dance has been acknowledged to be an ‘under-resourced art form’ in Ireland (McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013) it is not expected that professional level training would be a panacea for all issues. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that many dancers who train abroad do not reconnect with professional networks in Ireland (O'Brien 2010) and therefore, it is clear that Ireland is annually exporting the most talented young dancers to other countries rather than having them contribute to the development of the art form at home. Dancers who are not in a position to continue their training abroad have no opportunity to become professionalised in their chosen career and this further depletes the status of the art form in Ireland.

In order to facilitate the reconnection of dancers post graduation to the Irish professional dance sector, the Step Up Dance Project was established in 2011 by the Arts Council, Dance Ireland and the University of Limerick. At time of writing, the programme is operated as a partnership between Dance Limerick, Dance Ireland and the University of Limerick and involves five-weeks intensive training with international and Irish choreographers culminating in a week of public studio performances in Ireland. Six graduates are selected to participate through a competitive application process. All accommodation costs are covered and participants are paid an honorarium for their involvement. This programme gives Irish and/or Irish based dance graduates the opportunity to develop skills in a professional context and to interact with peers and professionals from the Irish contemporary dance sector. The performances allow them to showcase their talents in an Irish context, thus leading to future employment possibilities within Ireland.

### **1.3 Numbers of students travelling abroad**

As part of *Step Up: A Feasibility Report*, O'Brien undertook a survey of dance foundation courses and youth companies in Ireland to ascertain how many students travel abroad to continue their training. Her calculation in 2010 was that approximately 50 dance students yearly, transition from training in Ireland to training abroad, with another 50 or so, who do not continue into professional training. Figures below do not indicate a major decline from O'Brien's (2010) estimated number (approx. 30%). However, according to representatives of the various prevocational training institutions and youth dance companies in Ireland, there has been a decline in students taking up places in conservatories abroad and the number able to finance high level training abroad is likely to continue to fall. Below is an outline of current figures for the years 2012 to 2014 and Figure 1.3 collates these statistics over these three years.

Figure 1.1 Graduates from Pre-Vocational Training Programmes

	2012	2013	2014
Inchicore	15	16	19
College of Dance	13	18	15
BIFE	9*	9*	9*
CSN	15*	15*	15*
Sallynoggin	15*	15*	15*
Totals	67	73	73

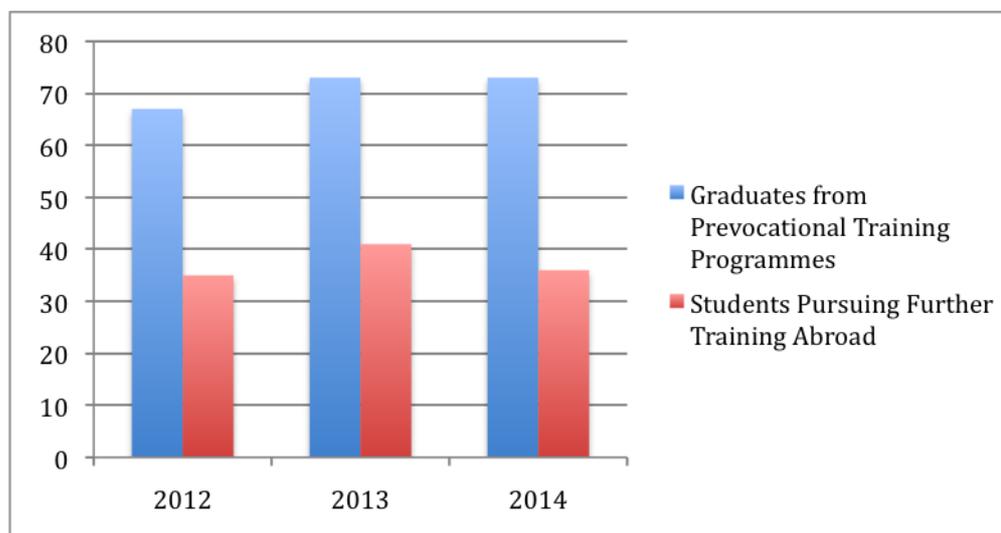
\*These are estimates based on previous data, as exact numbers were not provided.

Figure 1.2 Graduates Pursuing Further Training Abroad

	2012	2013	2014
Inchicore	5	6	3
College of Dance	7	12	10
BIFE	9	9	9
CSN	5*	5*	5*
Sallynoggin	9*	9*	9*
Totals	35	41	36

\*These are estimates based on previous data, as exact numbers were not provided.

Figure 1.3 Graduates from prevocational training versus students pursuing training abroad



In 2014, out of 73 dance graduates countrywide, 36 pursued further training abroad. In addition to this, the youth dance companies surveyed<sup>12</sup> identified a total of 16 students pursuing further training via their organisations. This number should not be considered additional to the figures above as there is clear cross over between pre-

<sup>12</sup> See appendix.

vocational training programmes and youth dance companies. Indeed, many of the youth dance companies undertake a mentoring role to give students performance experience and skills for auditioning abroad. However, considering that these numbers do not include students attending the plethora of private dance schools that exist throughout the country that continue into training abroad the following statistics should be treated as conservative estimates taken from a sample study rather than a comprehensive survey of the terrain.

The collated information indicates that on average 71 students graduate annually from a training programme in Ireland and of these, at least 37 students annually are of sufficient technical ability to gain a place on an accredited dance programme abroad. Although the surveys indicate that students increasingly must compromise the quality of the institutions they attend, it should be noted that the majority of schools are established conservatories with international standing. As finances and family support play such key roles in the decision for students to undertake training, it can be assumed that many of the graduating students may well have the ability and would wish to continue their training if one such programme were available in Ireland. It should be further noted that average intake on professional level dance training programmes range from 20 to 30 students annually. This indicates that there is sufficient need to merit the foundation of a professional dance course. To form a comparison across disciplines, following consultation with the Irish Theatre sector, the LIR Academy have set their annual intake of undergraduate students to 14 (including 2 EU places) as this was proposed as sustainable for the theatre industry to absorb on an annual basis.

### **1.3.1 Profile of training institutions attended by Irish students**

As mentioned above, in general the quality of dance training institutions attended by Irish students is of a high standard. Students continue to gain places in prestigious UK conservatories such as London Contemporary Dance School, Central School of Ballet and Northern School of Contemporary Dance. Notably, in 2015, an Irish student, Gearóid Solan, was the first Irish male student in thirty years to be accepted to the Royal Ballet School in London (Kelly 2015). Collated from the survey responses given by the pre-vocational courses and youth dance companies consulted, the main schools that Irish students have attended over the last three years are listed below. An asterix indicates which schools offer conservatory training in either ballet or contemporary dance – or both:

- Ailey School, New York (US)\*
- Arts Educational School, London (UK)
- Bird College, Kent (UK)
- Central School of Ballet, London (UK)\*
- Fontys Dance Academy, Tilburg (NL)\*
- Institute of the Arts, Barcelona (ES)\*
- Laine Theatre Arts, Surrey (UK)
- London Contemporary Dance School (UK)\*
- London Studio Centre (UK)
- Northern Ballet School, Manchester (UK)
- Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Leeds (UK)\*
- Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance, London (UK)\*
- Royal Ballet School, London (UK)\*

- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow (UK)\*
- Scottish School of Contemporary Dance, Dundee (UK)\*
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Dance and Music, London (UK)\*
- Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, Hertfordshire (UK)

Additionally, as outlined earlier, a number of students continue their education in liberal arts degree courses in the UK. In particular, the Bray Institute of Further Education creates a pathway for students to undertake a top up year in order to achieve a BA (Hons) at the following universities: University of Sunderland; University of Bath Spa; University of Middlesex; De Montfort University; University of Chester; University of Chichester; University of Doncaster; University of Winchester and Edinburgh College.

## **CHAPTER 2: Key components for a third-level dance-training course**

### **2.1 International trends in training**

At an international level, dancer training has evolved considerably in the past two decades with a range of compelling and often opposing debates on the most effective and ethical ways to educate dancers for 21<sup>st</sup> century dance practice. The following section explores current thinking in the field; key issues in training and outlines the requirements for a full time programme, including an outline of core subjects.

The firm establishment of dance within third level academic programmes has developed transparency and accountability in an educational model that formerly was hierarchical and teacher centred (Warburton 2008) to become more student-centred as dance pedagogy aligns with contemporary pedagogical theory. At the same time, arguably, dance has become more concerned with virtuosity, with developments in Dance and Science through organisations such as the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS) aligning dancers with athletes and applying a range of sports sciences methods to the research and training of dancers. Another key topic for dance training is the use of Somatic practices within dance training, mainly for their value in developing autonomy for young dancers and their complementary nature as a student centred teaching approach (Roche and Huddy 2015 ; Fortin 1993). Codified modern dance styles such as Graham or Cunningham technique are no longer dominant in training institutions, which often employ teachers who adopt hybrid idiosyncratic dance techniques to produce ‘eclectic dancing bodies’ (Bales and Nettle-Fiol 2008).

Through the influence of the Judson Dance Theatre in the 1960s in the US and the emergence of ‘concept dance’ in the 1990s and 2000s in Europe, the nature of what constitutes technique and to what end is still debated and varies across different areas of the international dance scene. Furthermore, the acknowledgments of shifts in employment practices for dancers through the growth of the Independent Dance Sector internationally have led to the understanding that most dancers will have a ‘portfolio career’ (Throsby 2004) rather than being employed continuously by one company. This has influenced conservatory training in dance and other performing arts in the UK and further afield to develop entrepreneurial qualities in students that allow them to adapt to a changeable career pathway. The balance required between

training models that produce highly specialised dancers vis-à-vis the versatility needed for a life-long career in dance has attracted criticism over what has been seen to water down levels of rigour and excellence required for a career in the arts and dance in particular<sup>13</sup>. In spite of this, it is clear that excellence and versatility are not mutually exclusive and those consulted for this report outlined the necessity for dancers in Ireland to be trained to a high technical level in line with current international standards.

### **2.1.1 Training approaches, styles**

Style in dance is a fundamental consideration. For example, Bales (2008,72) outlines that whereas the ballet class has a direct link to ballet repertoire, ‘in the much less organized world of dance post-Judson, where training is mostly self-styled, and choreographic material can come (...theoretically) from anywhere, there is no such direct link between training and repertoire’. As written above, many contemporary dance teachers develop hybrid approaches to training based on the integration of other movement-based techniques such as the Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique or yoga. This does not mean that these approaches have less rigour than codified techniques, although students may have more possibility to shape idiosyncratic approaches to movement rather than being completely formed stylistically by their training. The recent German Tanzplan project which produced the publication *Dance Techniques 2010* (Diehl and Lampert 2011) examined modern and postmodern dance techniques, outlining the underlying principles of each approach. They explain<sup>14</sup>,

Contemporary dance is characterized by many styles and ways of working, and the different types of training each have a unique role to play. Dance teachers can source a hybrid network of dance forms and body-work techniques, along with presentation methods and teaching forms. Yet, at the same time, the method of training contributes to the style: the way of working informs any individual artistic practice.

(Diehl and Lampert 2011, 10)

Contemporary dance techniques are tools to impart core movement principles and expressive qualities that should be transferrable across contexts. The stylistic elements are often imparted by the individual teacher’s way of moving but this should allow for the development of the students’ individual expressive qualities in order to prepare them for the various working contexts they will encounter.

### **2.1.2 Relationship between Contemporary Dance and Ballet**

As outlined in McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien (2013) many professional training courses utilise ballet and contemporary styles as complimentary training systems. Even when the focus of training is on contemporary dance, the usefulness of ballet as a training system has been widely acknowledged. For example, Bales (2008: 72)

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<sup>13</sup> For example, recent controversy has erupted in the UK when three key choreographers, Akram Khan, Lloyd Newson and Hofesh Shechter complained about the poor quality of dancers being produced by the main conservatoires in Britain (Jennings 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Diehl and Lampert (2011) examined the Humphrey-Limón tradition, Counter technique (developed by Anouk Van Dijk), Jooss- Leder Technique, Cunningham Technique, Minding Motion (Gill Clarke’s approach to teaching), Muller Technique (developed by Jennifer Muller) and Release and Alignment Oriented Techniques.

explains the benefit of ballet for the post-Judson dancer for reasons of ‘alignment, strength, speed, endurance, efficiency, suppleness, articulation’, acknowledging that many postmodern choreographic styles draw from a shared sense of verticality with ballet even though the choreography and performance style will differ greatly.

However, specialised training to professional level in ballet often takes place at highly competitive academies linked to established companies such as The Royal Ballet or English National Ballet Schools in London where a range of considerations such as body suitability are part of the criteria for acceptance; ‘the social world of ballet depends on a uniformity of body shape and size which is predicated on physical architecture...as the balletic body emphasises preciseness in line, placement and visual design’ (Pickard 2013, 7). Therefore, while the world of contemporary dance currently has a more democratised (Banes 1993) view of factors such as body shape, race and disability, ballet requires a more specialised career trajectory which makes training within a university context, where diversity and accessibility is paramount, challenging.

Young Irish ballet dancers should have the opportunity to train to a high level in Ireland and there are examples, such as the Palucca University in Dresden<sup>15</sup> where training is developed in each genre to an equally high standard. It could be argued however, that specialisation in one or other form, contemporary or ballet, must take place at some stage of training to reach a high level in the chosen genre. Options within a training programme could allow for this specialisation to occur in the final year of study.

### **2.1.3 Performer Training programmes versus Dance Studies degrees**

Although within the global landscape there is a variety of third level dance education models, there are two main approaches to dance degrees within a university context: Dance Studies degrees and Performer Training programmes. Dance Studies degrees, traditionally, have focused on a broader graduate profile beyond performance in the professional arena and often have less dance contact hours, with theory lectures equalling in number those of dance technique classes. Performer Training programmes train students for careers as professional dancers or choreographers, with a direct focus on professional practice.

Two examples of Dance Studies degrees are found in McGrath, Parnell and O’Brien (2013) and O’Brien (2010). These are University of Ulster and University of Limerick BA Voice and Dance. At the time of writing the report, neither of these courses met the minimum of thirty to thirty-five dance contact hours per week as recommended by McGrath, Parnell and O’Brien (2013), Marzin (2003) Leatherdale and Todd (1998) and recognised as standard internationally. Within a Dance Studies course, students can take a range of subjects to develop competencies across diverse potential career paths. For example, at the University of Auckland, the Dance Studies Programme focuses on: ‘specialist knowledge, effective communication, general intellectual skills and capabilities, independence, creativity and learning, and ethical and social understanding’<sup>16</sup> through a range of course subjects, including in year 1: Dance

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix.

<sup>16</sup> University of Auckland website [Accessed 09/02/16]

<http://www.creative.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-faculty/schools-programmes-and-centres/dance-studies/about-dance-studies.html>

Vocabulary (Ballet), Dance Education, Kapa Haka [practical Māori performance subject], Pacific Music and Dance, Dance History and Contexts, Contemporary Dance and Choreography, Dance Kinesiology and one elective subject<sup>17</sup>. Traditionally Dance Studies courses have not emphasized professional level training but employ a criticality in approach that gives the foundation for further academic based dance research alongside the practical skills for a career in roles such as community dance practice, teaching, interdisciplinary arts practice and related fields. This can be seen to have radically different goals to professional training in a third level institution. Elizabeth Dempster (2004), for example, questions whether professional training with its specific focus can develop sufficient criticality in order to contribute to research inquiry in the field of dance studies. Dance Studies degrees are extremely important in developing a dance culture and training graduates who can develop awareness of and engagement with dance across a range of age and social groups.

Whereas many university-based performer training programmes in the US emerged out of physical education departments which placed dance within liberal arts education (Bales and Nettle-Fiol 2008), in the UK many professional training programmes which award a bachelor degree have developed through independent conservatories such as Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance (UK), London Contemporary Dance School (UK) and Palucca University (Germany) becoming accredited through associated universities<sup>18</sup>. These courses work autonomously along the conservatory model with strong links to professional practice. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> year sample subjects for London Contemporary Dance School<sup>19</sup> are: Dance Technique and Performance (Contemporary Dance Techniques and performances of repertory or created works); Fundamental Approaches to Movement (Pilates, Body Conditioning, Feldenkrais Technique and Yoga); Dance Composition; Design for Performance (costume, scenography, lighting and video); Improvisation (Contact, Gaga<sup>20</sup> and Action Theatre); Introduction to Critical Studies (contextualisation of dance practices in arts and culture) and Enhancement (end of term projects with visiting professional dance artists). Another model is the development of professional training within technical colleges, which traditionally have had a stronger focus on vocational training and ‘real world learning’<sup>21</sup>. Examples are Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane (previously Queensland Institute of Technology)<sup>22</sup> and in Drama and Music, Dublin Institute of Technology (Conservatory of Music and Drama). The LIR Academy in Trinity College, Dublin is

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<sup>17</sup> University of Auckland website [Accessed 09/02/16]

<http://www.creative.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-faculty/schools-programmes-and-centres/dance-studies/ds-study-options/ds-bdancest.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Palucca Hochschule is an exception as it has been awarded university status by the German government.

<sup>19</sup> London Contemporary Dance School Prospectus [Accessed 09/02/16]

<http://www.lcds.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/London%20Contemporary%20Dance%20School%20Prospectus%202016.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Gaga is a movement language developed by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin that is used in training for dancers, ‘which emphasizes the exploration of sensation and availability for movement’ [Accessed 12/02/16]. <http://gagapeople.com/english/ohad-naharin/>

<sup>21</sup> QUT Blueprint 4 [Accessed 11/04/16]

[https://cms.qut.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/71113/qut-blueprint.pdf](https://cms.qut.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/71113/qut-blueprint.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> See appendix 2 for course outline.

an example of a Drama conservatoire model operating autonomously within a university.

Dance Studies degrees and performer training degrees are not mutually exclusive, in that there are many parallel subjects that have relevance across both courses. Indeed, with shared subjects, there are possibilities to run two degrees—professional training and dance studies—from the same institution as a means to draw in larger numbers of students under one umbrella bachelor degree. The benefits of this include the ability to interconnect dance theory and high level practice, draw in professional expertise and industry connections, broaden the definitions of community and interdisciplinary practice and develop the dance research profile of a department.

## 2.2 Course subjects - example of course subjects

Based on a scan of a range of current performer training programmes, the following outline of course subjects is offered as guidance. Priority has been given to practical studio work, augmented by subjects that contextualise this practical learning through developing critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurial acuity and knowledge of anatomy and kinesiology.

*Contemporary Dance* e.g. Cunningham technique, Release technique, Counter technique: As outlined above, there is a broad range of approaches to contemporary dance training that could be appropriate to draw from. It is important that students develop strength, alignment, safe dance practices, musicality, expressivity and adaptability through these classes and that there is a complementarity in the combination of approaches.

*Ballet* should be taught through a contextualisation of the particular style of teaching, e.g. Cecchetti, Vaganova etc. to impart key stylistic and expressive qualities. The primary focus of the course and the career goals of the students should underlie how ballet is taught. For example, due to this genre's prescriptive body characteristics, it is important that students are not forced to conform to unrealistic alignments that may have a damaging impact on the body and morale. Pointe work for women, pas de deux and male coaching classes are important components of this subject.

*Other dance genres* Students should be exposed to other dance genres, such as, Irish Traditional dance, jazz, Hip Hop and African Dance. These could be integrated as part of the on-going curriculum or accessed via intensives, workshops or performance projects.

*Partnering* e.g. Contact improvisation and Contemporary Partnering. Students, both male and female, will need to develop strength in partnering. Important physical understanding, such as giving and receiving 'weight', underlie many partnering techniques. Students should become skilled in different ways of partnering through improvisation, learning set choreography and devising movement material to reflect professional practice.

*Choreography* As dancers are required to think choreographically within the creative process, choreography should include basic compositional tools, task-based composition, conceptual frameworks in choreographic thinking and knowledge of interdisciplinary collaborative practice. These skills should be honed throughout the

course with increased possibility for creation and performance of student work as the course progresses.

**Performances** Opportunities for students to work with professional choreographers is an important element of training. At least once per year for each year (and more for the final year) these choreographers should be externally sourced. Where possible permanent or casual faculty teachers should choreograph so that students can perform at the end of each semester.

**Anatomy and kinesiology** Students should be given a solid working knowledge of anatomy from theoretical, practical and experiential perspectives.

**Complementary Training** e.g. Body conditioning, Pilates, Somatics, yoga and fitness. This training should augment the students' development of skills in their technique classes and be aligned to learning within anatomy and kinesiology subjects.

**Improvisation** Students should develop skills in improvisation through exposure to appropriate techniques such as Gaga, William Forsythe's improvisation technologies and theatre techniques, such as, Viewpoints.

**Contextualisation of dance** Dance history; understanding the development of western theatre dance in an Irish and international context; Dance Analysis: understanding how to interpret, evaluate and describe dance in relation to socio-cultural issues and historical developments and 21<sup>st</sup> century dance: understanding the particular concerns of the art form post 2000.

**Entrepreneurship** Development of career skills such as creating CVs, managing online and social media presence and developing career plans.

**Audition processes** As students will be embarking on intensive physical training it is essential that the audition process is rigorous to ascertain the physical and psychological strength of applicants. It is usual for students to audition over the course of a least one day, by participating in technique classes in contemporary and ballet, interview and solo presentations. Students should also be required to undertake screening by a physiotherapist in advance of this to identify any potential weaknesses and impediments that could cause injury through the course of the training programme.

**Health and well-being** Monitoring by a physiotherapist should be on going throughout the course to ensure that injuries are picked up at an early stage, where possible, and injury rehabilitation programmes are provided for students who incur injuries. Access to advice on nutrition, including information sessions on maintaining healthy nutrition levels should be built into the course. These elements should work in tandem with institutional wide counselling and financial support provision for students.

## **2.3 Resources and facilities required**

### **2.3.1 Teaching staff profile**

The quality of dance teaching is an essential component in any professional training programme and should not be underestimated. It is important to have core dance staff

to coordinate and oversee the design and delivery of curriculum but equally important to draw on high quality teachers from the professional sector. Teaching within a third level institution requires understanding of considerations such as transparency, professionalism, accountability and equity for all students. Much has been written about the balance between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge with the understanding that excellent dancers are not necessarily excellent teachers (Fortin 1993; Warburton 2008). However, to deliver dance training at professional level it is essential to engage dance teachers that have had significant professional careers as dancers and/or high quality training in dance teaching. When drawing directly on teachers working as professional dancers or choreographers in the dance industry, it is important to acknowledge the differences between the cultures of professional practice and institutional training. For example, dance companies operate on a scale from highly informal to deeply hierarchical and guest teachers operating from either extreme could create conflicts with the ethos of a university environment; the transparency and accountability expected in university assessments are not necessarily mirrored in the professional context. Thus, there needs to be an experienced full-time faculty in place to mediate these relationships.

In terms of appointing permanent faculty within a third-level institution, meeting the dual remit of practical dance knowledge skills and sufficient status as a researcher (i.e. minimum Masters but preferably PhD level degree) is challenging. Many university departments will not hire permanent staff below PhD level, which means that candidates for such a position who have the necessary qualifications alongside industry and teaching expertise are rare. In the case of a professional level BA degree, this would need to be supplemented by associate lecturers or casual staff with high quality industry credentials and perhaps short-term intensive positions such as dancer/choreographer in residence. One model that has circumvented this issue is the LIR Academy, which, as an autonomous organisation within Trinity College Dublin, employs teachers on a part-time basis directly from industry. These staff members are not subject to the usual research, teaching and service requirements of TCD nor are they required to have an academic degree in order to teach on the performer-training course.

### **2.3.2 Exposure to professional practice**

In order to develop ‘creative dexterity’, defined by Rowe and Zietner-Smith (2011, 41) as ‘an ability to shift between levels of engagement with the choreographic process’, many dance conservatories embed opportunities to engage with professional choreographers in the creation of new works for student performances. These are important for linking students directly with industry trends while giving them the opportunity to develop skills in studio practice, professional etiquette, individual processes of dance-making and developing potential future relationships with working choreographers. In a climate where more and more choreographers work on a project basis, dancers have fewer opportunities to experience apprenticeships as these traditionally have been offered through full-time companies. Therefore in-built professional experience within training provides an important learning opportunity. Where possible, work placements or secondments with dance companies should be facilitated to give students experience of professional practice. This may extend to students performing in professional productions through their secondment role.

### 2.3.3 Performance opportunities

High quality performance opportunities in fully equipped venues are important to teach students skills such as stagecraft and professionalism. It is ideal if an institution has access to a fully equipped theatre on site, so that students can have appropriate time to rehearse intensively and learn the workings of a venue. Ideally this would extend to workshops in lighting and set design (for example, this is part of the curriculum for London Contemporary Dance School). The potential for site-specific and interdisciplinary projects is also beneficial and experience working with high quality choreographers should be balanced by student opportunities to devise and produce work. This could extend to collaborations with students of other disciplines resulting in a range of potential live and/or New Media outputs, with disciplines such as Dance and Film, Interactive and Visual Design, Visual Arts, Music and Theatre.

### 2.3.4 Space

Appropriate studio spaces are essential for any dance training programme. Dance spaces have particular needs in order to ensure safe dance practice, avoid injury and promote professional level activities. The Arts Council's summary report *Giving Body to Dance: Review of building-based dance infrastructure in Ireland* (Macken and Curry 2010) outlines basic guidelines for dance studios drawn from a range of reports undertaken by relevant organisations in the UK. These guidelines include considerations such as quality of floor surface (a sprung floor with a smooth covering such as wood or vinyl<sup>23</sup>), amount of floor area (*Small Scale studio* 12m x 12m, *Medium Scale* 15m x 16m, *Large Scale* 18m x 19m<sup>24</sup>), studio height, appropriate heating systems (Equity minimum temperature is 18.3 degrees C/65 F but between 20°C and 24°C is preferable), ventilation, wall mounted sound system, appropriate lighting, Ballet barres and mirrors along one wall with curtains to cover them up when required (Macken and Curry 2010). Access for the disabled is an important consideration as is security, safety (e.g. appropriate access to Fire Exits) and suitable changing areas for male and female students (Macken and Curry 2010). Additional equipment such as audio-visual technology for in-studio teaching and learning is a further requirement to allow teachers to record student rehearsals and assessments or play footage when students are learning existing repertory pieces.

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<sup>23</sup> 'The need for properly designed sprung, semi-sprung or cushioned floors for dance is now clearly established; much stress and injury can result from dancing on rock-hard and unyielding floors. Badly-designed floors will accentuate the weaknesses in the dancer's anatomy by overtaxing tendons, joints and bones which may eventually lead to acute or chronic physiological conditions including stress fractures and musculoskeletal problems. Conflicts often arise in the design of multi-purpose halls or theatre spaces where the stage has to be shared with other users. However, for the wellbeing of dancers and participants in dance activities, a sprung floor which is used exclusively for dance is recommended. This is also related to hygiene as contemporary dancers often work bare-foot and so should not share floors with groups working in outdoor shoes. Also a smooth surface is important (i.e. no splinters or gaps between wooden floor boards). Flooring should comply with the European DIN-standard 18032 Part II, giving a shock absorption coefficient of at least 55%. Light coloured wood is best' (Macken and Curry 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Please note in the report, these sizes were directly related to rehearsal spaces rather than training studios. However, it is widely acknowledged that students in training require professional size spaces in order to develop dance skills, such as travelling and jumping to a professional level.

To run a three-year BA programme requires at the minimum, three medium-sized to large dance studios for exclusive use by the programme. ‘For a class of 25-30 students, a space at least 10m wide with a minimum of 14m length and height of 4.5m [...] is recommended’ (Macken and Curry 2010). However, two additional smaller studios for related activities such as coaching, alternative training (e.g. Somatics or body conditioning) and student rehearsals for assessments would be ideal. Where studios have been converted rather than custom built, every effort should be made to ensure that they meet the requirements of the guidelines as given in the *Giving Body to Dance Report*.

## CHAPTER 3: Potential for the establishment of a BA in Dance

### 3.1 Dance within Higher Education in Ireland

#### 3.1.1 Dance and the Creative Industries

Creative enterprises can be a powerful economic and social force in any economy; and creative entrepreneurs face a number of particular constraints in terms of access to appropriate education and training...

(Ó Cinnéide and Henry 2007, 84).

The economic commodification of the creative and performing arts has established a stronger case for the value of arts in society through clustering them under the umbrella of the Creative Industries. This includes a range of other disciplines such as ‘advertising, architecture and design; publishing; broadcast media and recorded music...software development, computer services, digital media, communications and a range of activities within the heritage sector’ (Henry 2007, 1). In a ‘post-industrial economy’, creative industries are intrinsic to the ‘move from a production-based to a knowledge-based socio-economy’ (Ó Cinnéide and Henry 2007, 74). Thus, developments in this area are likely to significantly shift education and training patterns for dance in the coming decades with this ‘techno-economic paradigm for a knowledge economy’ (Bullen, Robb and Kenway 2004, 6) influencing established views of education in the arts and humanities. This positioning can benefit dance as the professional sector already operates within an interdisciplinary environment, for example, with theatre, music, set design and digital arts and a transdisciplinary setting, for example, with science, cognitive psychology, health and software development (i.e. gaming and virtual reality). Thus, the development of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary skills for graduates will encourage new approaches to dance within the creative economy and more employment and research possibilities for graduates. The recent report published by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the *Dublin Creative Arts Review*, which was undertaken by the HEA in 2012 to ‘review the provision of creative arts and media programmes in the Dublin region...in the context of a challenging economic climate in Ireland’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 2) recommends, ‘institutions that teach in the creative arts need to develop clear pathways from their subject-matter to identifiable outcomes, while also maintaining the core of a strong education in the humanities’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 43). The challenges lie in linking teaching and learning to employment

outcomes while maintaining pedagogical standards that develop critical and reflective facilities in learners.

### **3.1.2 Current infrastructure and consolidation of existing provision**

The *Dublin Creative Arts Review* calls for consolidation and clarification of educational pathways for learners through developing ‘vertical and horizontal partnerships between educational providers and cultural institutions, facilitating the consolidation of undergraduate and postgraduate programme provision, as well as the merging of providers’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 2). There is a strong focus on enhancing and consolidating existing provision rather than developing new third level institutions, with suggestions that existing arts institutions could provide necessary pathways through becoming ‘constituent colleges of a larger university organisational structure’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 13). Uversity is an example of an initiative that offers a Masters of Creative Arts for which students can custom choose modules from twenty-four Irish institutions<sup>25</sup>.

### **3.1.3 Funding through the Higher Education Authority**

Third level institutions are allocated funding by the HEA Recurrent Grant Allocation Model, introduced in 2006. Through this process, funding is awarded through collating student numbers and determining the ‘resource intensity of courses’, for example, studio based teaching receives 1.3 of the allocation (Buckley 2010, 22). Other factors, such as the socio-economic status of the population and available overall funding determine the amount of funding per capita. Universities have autonomy to distribute this funding across programmes<sup>26</sup>, which is important for a resource intensive subject, such as dance, that generally will have smaller class sizes due to selection criteria based on previous training, talent and physical aptitude. As outlined in the *Dublin Creative Arts Review*, ‘courses in the arts are popular and easy to fill but this does not mean that there will be employment when the students finish...while initial destination surveys are completed, this does little to map the complexities possible in the creative arts where there is predominance of “portfolio” types of careers’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 19). It is acknowledged within the Department of Education that there are inequities within current training provision for dance, in that many students are unable to continue training because they simply cannot afford to attend a conservatory abroad<sup>27</sup>. This means that only students with the financial means can access training to professional level.

### **3.1.4 Professional training with in a BA degree in Ireland**

The advantages of situating a professional level training programme within a university model are manifold. They include the potential to develop high quality infrastructure and provide funding support for a resource intensive subject such as dance through other undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The ability for dance to interact with different disciplines and for dance students to access a variety of elective subjects can allow students to develop bespoke learning and creative development opportunities. The formation of partnerships with national or international, industry based or academic institutions can extend networks for further study or lead to professional opportunities. For dance students to undertake professional training while situated within a vibrant interdisciplinary research culture

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<sup>25</sup> See Uversity’s website [Accessed 15/03/16] <http://www.uversity.org>

<sup>26</sup> Deirdre McDonnell personal correspondence.

<sup>27</sup> Deirdre McDonnell personal correspondence

can only enhance the scope of possibilities for their future careers in the dance profession.

In order to meaningfully address the need for high-level dance training and establish a dance programme within a university structure, it is vital that the industry driven needs of such a programme inform the structure of any course. For example, lessons should be gleaned from previous challenges faced by higher level arts education courses, such as the BA degree at Trinity College, which preceded the LIR Academy but had to close because, according to, head of academic studies at the LIR, Professor Brian Singleton, it ‘lacked a clear identity (it was neither a stand-alone school nor a conservatory) and sufficient financing’ (Healy 2011). The dilution of an industry focused perspective in higher level arts education was commented upon by Bamford et al. (2013, 44) where it was stated that, ‘the move of further education colleges and technical colleges towards university frameworks has put pressure to make subjects more theoretical and to lessen the practical, industry focus of the courses’. Furthermore, they outlined that ‘reduction in part-time teaching hours and less visiting artists has added to a sense of removal from the realities of contemporary arts practice’ (Bamford et al. 2013, 44). With this cautionary note, it is vital that dance industry standards are at the centre of the design of a BA programme and that these standards are benchmarked against international employment standards.

## **3.2 Establishing a National Academy of Dance in Ireland**

### **3.2.1 Existing models**

The LIR Academy is a successful model that could be used as a template for a similar initiative in dance. There are other Irish institutions such as the Royal Irish Academy of Music that have a distinguished track record in conservatory training and are now offering undergraduate degrees, which are accredited by Trinity College Dublin. Indeed, as outlined earlier, this is a prevailing model in the UK whereby conservatories such as Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and Central School of Ballet are running BA programmes accredited through partner universities. The Palucca School in Dresden is an example of an established training institution being granted university status by the government and becoming the first university of dance in Germany.<sup>28</sup>

For this model to work in Ireland, there would need to exist an established dance conservatoire with a proven track record and the necessary resources to develop programmes at professional level training. In the current landscape, there is no such institution, so one would have to be established. Although programmes may not become accredited immediately as BA degrees, based on international trends it would be advantageous to move towards offering this qualification. This is in order to access funding as part of the HEA’s National Qualifications Framework and also to attract students who recognise the necessity of holding a primary degree in an increasingly qualifications focused world. Accreditation could come from institutions such as DIT, who already have partnerships with a number of external schools including the RIAM and the Irish College of Musical Theatre.

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<sup>28</sup> See Palucca Hochschule website [Accessed 15/03/16]  
[http://www.palucca.eu/en/palucca\\_school/history.html](http://www.palucca.eu/en/palucca_school/history.html)

### **3.2.2 Links to the Irish dance sector**

There is certainly scope for initiatives that bring together expertise, resources and institutional accreditation. For example, Dance Ireland as an all-Ireland resource organisation has infrastructure that could support a training initiative with other training partners. CEO of the organisation, Paul Johnson explained that if the board and membership felt dance training was a priority, there was scope for Dance Ireland, to contribute to a training initiative, ‘the top floor of this building [DanceHouse], three studios and access to a resource room’<sup>29</sup>. He acknowledged that it would be difficult to bring various stakeholders in dance training together to be subsumed by a larger organisation unless there was a strong support from the dance community and a guiding body such as the Arts Council to mediate the process, perhaps in partnership with an accrediting university. In this case, it would be essential to harness the existing skill base of teachers in Ireland and to concurrently have an outward focus in recruiting teachers from abroad. As outlined by Leatherdale and Todd (1998) ‘there are many talented teachers of dance already within Ireland. However in order to ensure the course reflected the international dance community some teachers would need to be recruited from abroad either on a guest or short-term (3 or 4 years) contract basis’. Equally, consultation with existing course providers, private studio teachers and the professional dance sector would be an essential step in aligning the academy with the realities and needs of the dance ecology in Ireland, so that clear pathways into professional level training are enabled via existing provision.

### **3.2.3 Challenges to establishing a new training organisation**

However, based on its focus on consolidation outlined in the section 3.1, it is possible that the Department of Education or HEA might not prioritise the development of a new national academy of dance. This is further influenced by the current economic climate and in light of the range of colleges of further education and university courses that provide dance training up to a certain level. Although it is understood that these do not meet current needs at professional level, based on existing policy, the preferred route would be to consolidate pathways and extend existing provision to a standard that could meet the needs of young people wishing to train for a professional career<sup>30</sup>. An exception may be where philanthropic funds could be accessed to establish a national dance academy as in the case of the LIR academy. It should be noted that even within the support structure of Trinity College Dublin, this philanthropic support was essential to ensure appropriate infrastructure for the LIR to function as a conservatory and circumvent many of the funding and administrative restrictions that university arts degrees face<sup>31</sup>.

## **3.3 Key considerations for developments in this area**

### **3.3.1 Benchmarking from an Irish and international perspective**

Brinson (1985), Leatherdale and Todd (1998), Marzin (2003) and McGrath (2013) have all asserted the importance of international benchmarking in establishing a training programme of world-class quality and standing in Ireland, particularly in light of the fact that none such training programme has existed in Ireland to date.

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Johnson personal correspondence

<sup>30</sup> Deirdre McDonnell personal correspondence.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Singleton personal correspondence – also see appendix for outline of the LIR infrastructure

McGrath (2013) in particular, suggests liaising with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in order to develop ‘a quality control strategy for formal dance training in Ireland’ while suggesting that the course establishes a partnership with a dance accreditation body or dance training organisation of international standing. Both McGrath (2013) and Singleton<sup>32</sup> recommend an association with the CDD in the UK and indeed, it would be further advantageous to develop a close partnership with one of its affiliate schools such as London Contemporary Dance School or Northern School of Contemporary Dance. For example, the LIR academy, established a partnership with the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) London, which has enabled it to quickly establish itself through the use of RADA’s brand identity. RADA were also involved in the planning phase, infrastructure development and course design, drawing on their existing training model which was ‘reimagined for the Irish context’<sup>33</sup>. In addition to enhancing the profile of the course, partner organisations could give an opportunity to springboard Irish graduates into an international context through student and staff exchanges. Furthermore, creating associations with Irish and internationally based dance companies to establish apprenticeship opportunities for graduating students would be an important factor in increasing graduate employment success.

A number of conservatories in the UK and further afield have created postgraduate dance performance companies. These usually lead to a MA degree. For example, LCDS’s 4D, Trinity Laban’s Transitions and NSCD’s Verve are all comprised of graduates from their own institutions and beyond, who audition to form a company that tours new works or remounted repertoire from established choreographers. The Step Up Dance Project based in Dance Limerick is an initiative to facilitate the progression from dance training into professional practice through developing networks and performance opportunities for graduates of dance programmes in Ireland and abroad. This would be a valuable connection for a dance training programme in order to link graduates to Irish choreographers and companies. Although these initiatives are postgraduate, it is important that developments in the undergraduate area consider potential further pathways that can lead towards employment for its graduates.

### **3.3.2 National and international focus**

Leatherdale and Todd (1998) discussed the ideal location of a professional dance-training course given the obvious benefits to situating a course in Dublin, which at the time had the highest density of professional dance activity in Ireland. Since 1998, there have been notable infrastructural developments outside of Dublin, in particular in Limerick with the establishment of Dance Limerick in St John’s Church and the new dance studios at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at University of Limerick. Further to this is the development of curatorial dance programming at the Firkin Crane in Cork City and a range of dancer in residence programmes throughout the country. However, dance activity continues to be mostly concentrated in Dublin. This includes professional dance activity at the dedicated dance space in Dublin’s north city centre, DanceHouse, the annual Dublin Dance Festival and regular programming of Irish and international dance company performances in venues throughout the city. Through consultation with the sector at the time, Leatherdale and Todd (1998) determined that the location of a training course should not be made a

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<sup>32</sup> Personal correspondence

<sup>33</sup> Brian Singleton, personal correspondence

priority over the quality and delivery of such a course and there was insufficient reasoning behind establishing a new course ‘from scratch simply to enable it to be within the Dublin area’. Although cases could be made for either a Dublin-based or regional-based course, without the means to start a course from scratch, existing infrastructure and institutional support would be of primary importance in determining the location of the course. Furthermore, the HEA is unlikely to support more than one professional dance training course in Ireland due to the relatively modest demand compared to other subjects<sup>34</sup>.

### **3.3.3 Marketing and visibility**

The establishment of a training course would require a focused marketing programme to ensure that high quality students are recruited. Suitable students would need to be aware of the course and the career options associated with undertaking dance training. Prior to its first intake, the LIR Academy engaged in a nationwide campaign in different cities to raise awareness of the programme. Furthermore, they currently hold auditions in Dublin, New York, London and Belfast. Similarly, certain dance conservatories, such as Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance and London Contemporary Dance School, audition in Australia and North America respectively. Recruitment of European Union and international students should be a targeted focus of any new dance-training course. The *Dublin Creative Arts Review* (Bamford et al. 2013, 45) identified that Irish career advice officers have limited experience in ‘creative or cultural careers’. As dance is a somewhat unknown professional pathway in Ireland, schools career officers nationally should be informed in order to advise students of potential career pathways offered by a professional dance-training course.

### **3.3.4 Links to the dance industry**

In order to ensure that students are prepared to enter into a dance career, professional practice and industry norms should be at the centre of the design of any course. Links with Irish dance resource organisations such as Dance Ireland, Dance Limerick, Galway Dance Project and the Firkin Crane should be cultivated so that students may benefit from extra-curricular training opportunities such as international guest workshops. Connections with Irish and international dance companies should also be established to facilitate secondments, performing opportunities for students in professional productions and company residencies. With its programme of Irish and international dance performances, workshops and artist talks, Dublin Dance Festival would be a valuable partner, giving students exposure to trends within the international dance world. These connections could be linked to both practical and theoretical course subjects, so that students can develop critical responses to current dance developments that form the environment they will be entering into as professionals.

## **3.4 Positioning professional training in the dance ecology of Ireland**

### **3.4.1 Training within a continuum of practice**

In spite of the chronic under-resourcing of the art form (Brinson 1985; O'Brien 2010; Leatherdale and Todd 1998; McGrath, Parnell and O'Brien 2013), dance has come of

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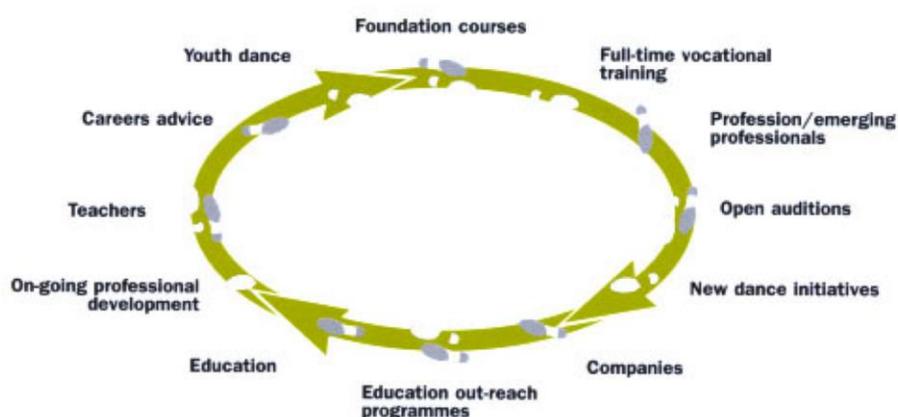
<sup>34</sup> Deirdre McDonnell personal correspondence.

age in Ireland. The dance sector has made significant gains towards professionalization and internationalisation since the funding cuts of 1989, which saw Arts Council dance funding drop to 2.9 per cent of the arts budget (McGrath 2013). Key indicators of this positive growth are the existence of resource organisations such as Dance Ireland, the Firkin Crane and Dance Limerick serving dance activity from purpose fitted studio spaces in key urban centres and Galway Dance Project promoting dance activity in the west of the country. Furthermore, the Dublin Dance Festival has been showcasing international and Irish work since 2002 at high profile venues throughout Dublin, with dance as a regular inclusion in the programmes of many of the major festivals such as Galway Arts Festival, Dublin Theatre Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival and Kilkenny Arts Festival.

Although there have not been significant gains for dance within the general education sector and it is still embedded within physical education rather than within arts education, there is evidence that dance activity is thriving within private dance schools, as exemplified by the flourishing of youth dance companies in Dublin and throughout the country. Another positive indicator is the alignment of dance foundation courses in Colleges of Further Education with the National Qualifications Framework, evidence of the move towards quality control and professionalization. Furthermore, initiatives such as the Step Up Dance Project fulfil an essential role in developing career pathways for recent graduates towards professional employment.

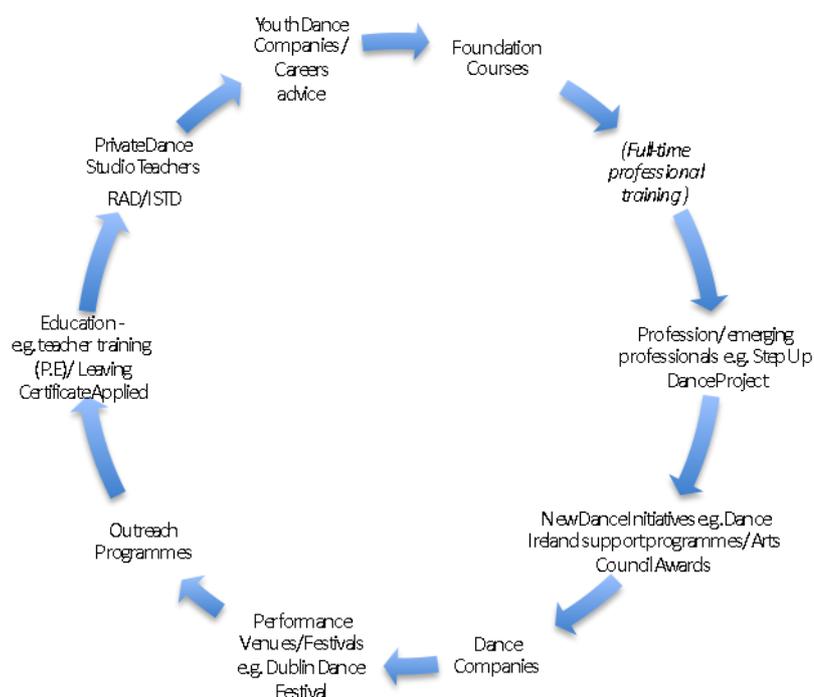
In terms of a viable national ecology for dance in Ireland, all the elements are in place to produce a strong and vibrant sector and it can therefore be surmised that the lack of professional level training is the weak link in the chain of professionalization. These major gains made in dance and listed above have fulfilled many of the recommendations of the Todd and Leatherdale (1998) report and thus, it is helpful to re-examine the following model they proposed for a ‘continuum of practice’:

Figure 3.1 Taken from Leatherdale and Todd (1998) ‘A Continuum of Practice



The following figure outlines the current status quo and how it might correspond with Leatherdale and Todd's (1998) original model of a continuum of practice above.

Figure 3.2 The Current Dance Ecology in Ireland



While there is need to continue to strengthen resources and infrastructural support throughout the sector, it is clear that the pathways are in place to support a training initiative and it could be surmised that a professional level training programme would bring focus and continuity to the sector.

### 3.4.2 Consultation with the dance sector

Finally, although a professional level training programme does not currently exist, it should not be assumed that the landscape is a *tabula rasa*. There have been many notable developments in dance education in previous years and talented dance teachers who have contributed significantly to the career pathways of Irish professional dancers. Therefore, it is recommended that any developments in this area include an inclusive and consultative approach that engages with the dance community. This has proven successful for theatre in the development of the LIR Academy and has ensured 'buy-in' by the theatre sector in forging collaborative pathways that enable students to move from preparatory training into the performers' course<sup>35</sup> and from graduation into the theatre profession.

There are structures in place to facilitate such consultation, in particular the resource organisations, Dance Ireland, Dance Limerick and Galway Dance Project, who could consult with the sector in tandem with the Arts Council. It should be noted that, according to Brian Singleton<sup>36</sup>, the LIR Academy emerged out of 'a furore that broke out in the media about the closure of our former acting course'. This action by

<sup>35</sup> Brian Singleton, personal correspondence

<sup>36</sup> Personal correspondence

industry has proven highly effective in establishing an acting course that has the endorsement of the theatre sector. For this systemic need to be addressed effectively there must be a systemic approach.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Conclusion: a summary of main findings from previous sections**

While a number of pre-vocational courses exist and valuable initiatives for dance graduates have emerged in recent years, there is no professional level dance training in Ireland and there has been no focused initiative to date that has addressed this lack at an institutional or governmental level. This has impacted negatively on the development of the sector and the development of dance students who have been unable to undertake professional training abroad for various reasons. There are approximately 37 students graduating from prevocational training and private dance schools annually with the capability of securing a place, through a competitive audition process, at conservatories of international standing abroad. This is the number, out of approximately 71 graduates from pre-vocational training annually, that are able to pursue this pathway, leaving many unable to do so, due to a range of obstacles including finances, emotional maturity and support networks. Thus, the current situation is inequitable for dance students.

Professional dance training has been influenced by global shifts in the employment market. Internationally, dance is recognised as a viable career choice within the creative economy, with professional dance training imparting a range of transferrable skills across creative, performance, research and teaching contexts. Accredited qualifications are key and thus, the majority of successful dance training programmes award a BA degree. This is increasingly important in the creative arts where it is understood that most professionals will have a 'portfolio career' (Bamford et al 2013), which in dance increasingly requires retraining for another career in early mid-life. The versatility required through employment practices in the dance sector has shaped training programmes and graduates are expected to have high-level technical abilities critical thinking skills, creative expertise and an entrepreneurial focus. Therefore, training should be multi-faceted, diverse, industry-focused, learner-centred and develop the autonomous outlook of the student. Dance is a resource intensive subject. High standard facilities are essential for safe dance practice. Equally, the quality of dance teachers determines the success of the student and teachers should be of a high quality, to align with international standards. Professional training programmes should select students carefully, ensuring that they have the capacity to become professional dancers and/or choreographers. Recruitment processes should be nationwide and (in the long-term) internationally focused, in order to ensure the highest standard possible with the maximum potential for graduate employment success.

Based on current policies within the HEA and the fact that no professional level academy of dance currently exists in Ireland, further developments in the area of professional dance training would be better focused on expanding existing infrastructure rather than creating a new institution from scratch. This could be through one of the various universities that currently have dance as a subject or through existing resources available to the professional sector, as indicated by CEO of

Dance Ireland, Paul Johnson in section 3.2. In tandem with national accreditation, international benchmarking should be a key component in establishing a training programme and the model of a major partnership with an international institution, as in the case of the LIR academy, would be highly beneficial in establishing standards from the offset.

This report concludes that in spite of major developments in the dance ecology in Ireland, professional level dance training remains a vital missing component of the 'continuum of practice' as outlined by Leatherdale and Todd (1998). When planning next steps, inclusivity and connection should be primary factors in any developments in this area. This should involve consultation with stakeholders that make up the various aspects of this ecology, to include representatives from private dance schools to dance companies and dance festivals to foundation courses and all relevant points in between (see Figure 3.2). It could be concluded that for every talented dancer that is able to pursue professional training abroad in spite of the significant challenges they face, there may be an equal number of promising dancers that are unable to continue any further on this path due to lack of opportunities. Furthermore, many that do train abroad discover that it can be challenging to find a place within the professional dance sector in Ireland once they have lived abroad for a number of years (O'Brien 2010; Leatherdale and Todd 1998).

The current lack of professional training in Ireland deprives the dance community of the renewal possible through a steady influx of new generations of dancers, who could bring fresh ideas, cutting edge skills and innovative perspectives to the advancement of the Irish professional dance culture. The key stakeholders in dance should consider professional dance training as the essential next stage in the professionalization of dance in Ireland. Significant developments in this area are crucial in order to bring Ireland into step with arts education in similar modern economies worldwide.

## APPENDIX

### Three case studies in brief

Organisation/Course: The LIR Academy, Trinity College Dublin – BA Actor Training

Modus operandi: Autonomous company situated within Trinity College Dublin

Awarding Body: Trinity College

Industry Partners: Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), London

Number of students: 14 per year for a three-year degree (9 semesters)

Sample subjects: Acting and Text; Voice Studies, Movement Studies, Ensemble Production; Productions (practical experience in a range of productions working with professional directors); Core Skills and Career Preparation and Audition Showcase.

Contact hours per week: 36 – 46

Graduate Profile 2014 (first year of graduation): Students were cast in prestigious productions at The Lyric Theatre, Belfast; Chichester Festival Theatre/Shakespeare's Globe; Druid/Dublin Theatre Festival; The Gaiety Theatre; The Peacock; Park Theatre London and The Donmar Warehouse, London.

Organisation/Course: Palucca Hochschule, Dresden, Germany

Modus operandi: University of Dance - Conservatory Model training

Awarding Body: Palucca University

Industry Partners: Semperoper Ballet, Dresden

Number of students: 20 per year for a three-year degree.

Sample subjects: Dance Technique (ballet, modern and contemporary dance; Improvisation/partnering; Choreographic process; Dance analysis; Music theory; Art history; Pas de Deux; Dance and Architecture; Dance and Film; Laban Movement Analysis and Dramaturgy.

Contact hours per week: 30 - 40

Graduate Profile: Recent graduates have gained contracts at Semperoper Ballet, Dresden, Royal Ballet, London, National Ballet of Portugal, Ballet Koblenz, Bundesjugendballett John Neumeier, Hamburg and National Ballet of Finland.

Organisation/Course: Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane - BFA Dance Performance

Modus operandi: Conservatory training model situated within a university (former technical college)

Awarding Body: QUT

Industry Partners: Expressions Dance Company, The Queensland Ballet and the Royal Academy of Dance, UK.

Number of students: 20 to 30 per year for a three-year degree

Sample subjects: Dance Technique studies (Ballet, contemporary dance and yoga), Choreographic Studies, Architecture of the Body (Anatomy and Kinesiology), Pas de deux, Contemporary Partnering, Mindfulness, Performance (repertoire or new work from faculty or external choreographer), pointe work/variations/male coaching; Alternate training (e.g. fitness, body conditioning, Pilates or Feldenkrais method); Dance Analysis; Contextualising Dance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Dance and Technology; Teaching Dance and Integrated Professional Skills.

Contact hours per week: 35 - 45

Graduate Profile: Graduates have gained contracts as performers in all major companies in Australia including Australian Dance Theatre, Dance North, Australian

Ballet, Queensland Ballet, Expressions Dance Company, Bangarra Dance Theatre, and Chunky Move and internationally with companies such as Batsheva Dance Company (Israel), Ultima Vez (Belgium), the Royal New Zealand Ballet and Emanuel Gat Dance (France).

### **Interviewees:**

Professor Brian Singleton	Academic Director of The Lir Academy at Trinity College, Dublin
Dr Cliona Doris	Acting Head of the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, Dublin
Dr Sandra Joyce	Director of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick (UL)
Dr Mary Nunan	Course Director of MA Contemporary Dance Performance, UL
Professor Patrick Lonergan	Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies at National University of Ireland, Galway
Dr Aoife McGrath	Lecturer, School of Creative Arts at Queen's University, Belfast
Deirdre McDonnell	Department of Education and Skills
Brigid McManus	Former Secretary General of Department of Education and Skills
Paul Johnson	CEO of Dance Ireland, Dublin

### **Organisations contacted:**

Irish National Youth Ballet Company, Dublin  
Shawbrook, Longford  
Dublin Youth Dance Company  
CoisCéim Creative Steps, Dublin  
Youth Ballet West, Galway  
Coláiste Stiofán Naofa, Cork  
Inchicore College of Further Education, Dublin  
Sallynoggin College of Further Education, Dublin  
The College of Dance, Dublin  
Bray Institute of Further Education, Dublin/Wicklow  
Palucca Hochschule, Dresden  
Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

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