



U.DANCE 2015

22-25 July ○ Plymouth

Evaluation of Inclusion & Access

Executive Summary

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Terminology – For the purposes of this Executive Summary, where the term ‘inclusive’ is used, we mean inclusive of disabled youth dancers.

Introduction

Youth Dance England (YDE) runs U.Dance a national performance framework that stimulates performances at local, county, regional and national levels. We run an annual U.Dance national festival in different locations each year. An essential part of this framework is the running of regional performances across the country that serve as selection events for the national festival delivered by nine regional organisations. In 2015, in its ninth year, the national festival took place in Plymouth. YDE managed U.Dance 2015 with key partner Plymouth Dance.

In 2015 the festival had a focus on integrated dance and inclusion of disabled youth dancers. This had been proposed by, and stated as a priority for, Plymouth Dance when they applied to host U.Dance 2015. Whilst the national youth dance festival has always been open to disabled dancers, YDE recognised the need to highlight accessibility at the festival and put in measures which would encourage more inclusive groups to apply. YDE commissioned GDance¹ to evaluate the impact of this element of the festival. This Executive Summary relates to their full 76 page report. One of the benefits of working with GDance was that their work on evaluating U.Dance 2015 could feed into ongoing development of the National Inclusive Dance Network’s (NIDN) Tipping Point national strategy.

The full report will be shared with all youth dance groups and U.Dance 2015 partners and contractors consulted, as requested.

Drawing on the recommendations a set of Guidelines have been produced to help support youth dance platform organisers to boost their confidence and practice around inclusion of disabled dancers.

Headline information

U.Dance 2015 national event, July (22- 25) included:

- Three performances in the Plymouth Theatre Royal featuring 323 young performers, watched by 1527 audience members
- 21 workshops and classes for 323 young dancers
- 20% of the groups included disabled youth dancers; 8% of total participants were disabled dancers, (greater than the national percentage: disabled children and young people constitute 6% of the total population in that age range)
- 44 Teachers, leaders and dance professionals participated in CPD sessions

The U.Dance national festival in Plymouth was a catalyst for:

- 247 applications for the national festival (206 in previous year) an increase of 17%
- 15 Inclusive Groups applying (11 in previous year), which was an increase of 36%
- Eight regional performances in England involving 1316 young dancers and watched by 3,520 people
- A national development project managed by Plymouth Dance, worked with inclusive dance groups around the country to help increase skills and confidence in choreography and performance.

¹ GDance is a production and training company specialising in inclusive practice.

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- Extensive local engagement programme run in Plymouth, in association with the national festival, involving 820 young people and 14,700 audiences watching outdoor events in city centre. 7% of the participants were disabled.
- 20,700 estimated audience for U.Dance 2015, national festival and associated local engagement programme
- 109 U.Dance local registrations, involved 13,800 young people and watched by 26,600 people across England.

In total: 16,250 young people took part in U.Dance, and associated programmes, and 47,300 people viewed U.Dance performances in 2015.

Summary of achievements, learning and recommendations

“It is good to raise the profile of inclusive dance and make a ‘step forwards’. We could have made a bigger step but there is still time...let's not take too long” - Inclusive Group Leader.

The recommendations were made from the perspective of what would best support the development and inclusion of more disabled youth dancers / inclusive groups, based on all the feedback received during the evaluation process. GDance recognised that YDE and its regional U.Dance partners will need to balance these recommendations with the needs voiced by non-disabled dancers and groups with which they perform. This section summarises some of the key points from the full report, which is available from Youth Dance England by emailing u.dance@yde.org.uk.

The focus on inclusive dance:

The 2015 focus did help attract new / unsure applicants and has significantly raised debate across the sector, driving forward thinking around inclusive practice. The creation of new marketing images to attract groups including disabled dancers was welcomed, as was the engagement of inclusion specialists in the selection process. The boost to the number of inclusive groups showcased at regional and national levels was valued by all: *“it's rare that groups get the opportunity to see (and learn from) each other's work in this way.”*

Perceptions:

Even though there is a nervousness from group leaders and panel specialists regarding showing some work in an unfavourable/unhelpful context the majority of those consulted did feel that the performances including disabled youth dancers were equally as strong as those without disabled dancers.

There were huge positives in terms of impact on non-disabled dancers / group leaders. There is a general openness and desire to see and / or integrate with more inclusive dance (across the regions, amongst leaders of non-disabled dance groups, non-disabled dancers and audience members).

Regarding the sector / the work itself:

The evaluation revealed that opportunities for inclusive groups to perform is patchy across the country. Through funding cuts there is less provision of grass roots activity, which is preventing disabled young people from entering and progressing in dance. This is also compounded by the lack of visibility of professional disabled dance artists at many events.

The cost:

There are additional costs for many inclusive groups (e.g. support workers) in travelling to youth platforms. The access budget provided for those attending the national platform was welcomed.

However there is a shortage of funds to cover the costs of running inclusive groups on an ongoing basis as well as finding funds for projects and performances that limits access to performances and other progression routes.

The U.Dance framework and process:

It was suggested that more localised platforms and other development work, in addition to high profile national event(s), would better suit the current development stage of inclusive dance.

Access:

Building relationships between platform organisers and inclusion specialist individuals/partners is key. Physical access was relatively carefully considered but there were challenges for organisers balancing the various requirements for the platforms as a whole. As a result of the evaluation GDance has produced useful guidance to assist performance organisers to make their events more accessible including: checklists, group leader's visits, information for leaders, alternative ways of gathering feedback, more flexible schedules, relevant careers talks, simplifying application processes and development of databases of inclusive groups and intermediaries.

Some organisers need to consider access more broadly (than just physical access), e.g. content and approach for workshops and talks.

Consideration should be given to how platform organisers can be encouraged to: include more fringe opportunities into their events and/or commission artists to work with inclusive groups on a performance piece.

Organisers should continue to offer the option to show films both at national and regional events, as this is the only affordable way some inclusive groups have been able to have a presence at platforms in the past

Training and development:

Ongoing training for choreographers should be offered to those working/wishing to work with disabled youth dancers, to include guidelines on use of language/vocabulary in sessions. Organisers of events should also receive training on best practice around inclusion and access for projects and events.

The feedback on the Mass Dance (an outdoor performance to bring all the participants of the national festival together) was an example of how further training needs to be done to ensure effective use of integrated practice. The filmed sections were evaluated as not helpful in communicating the principles involved in integrated practice and unhelpful to groups in adapting the movement material to their needs.

Workshop artists should be identified far enough in advance for regional and national platforms, to take part in training / sharing of best practice around inclusive teaching practice.

Buddy up inclusion specialist organisations / individuals with platform organisers annually so that they can provide mentoring / a sounding board (in a paid, consultancy role).

To promote consistency across the regions incorporate into annual U.Dance partners' meetings: disability awareness training / discussion and awareness needed around inclusive practice and discussion about shared selection criteria.

Promotion / Databases

Simplify Guidelines and offer / provide them in alternative formats (e.g. large print, audio) and issue the Guidelines well in advance of platforms. Ensure all regional partners are aware that they must use YDE's guidelines and application form template.

The marketing focus and promotional campaigns worked to raise awareness and increase participation. Continue to stress U.Dance's interest in receiving applications from groups including disabled dancers.

Consider and potentially fundraise to appoint one or more 'inclusion ambassadors' to lead a cross-country initiative to identify and encourage more groups including disabled dancers to apply or become part of local U.Dance platforms where they exist.

Encourage all U.Dance partners to categorise their databases so that it's clear which groups include disabled dancers and/or which schools and colleges have disabled students.

Evaluation

Establish a common evaluation framework across the regional partners including assessment of how organisers have done in terms of access and inclusion.

Provide evaluation tools in alternative formats and talk in advance to inclusive group leaders regarding what will work for their group.

Appointment and briefing of artists, staff and volunteers

Wherever possible, all platforms should endeavour to appoint one or more disabled artists or volunteers as speakers, workshop leaders and/or guides/helpers.

Ensure all those appointed (volunteers, assistants, artists, panel members, stage crew) are briefed regarding the access requirements of each group and given basic disability awareness briefing / training.

Considerations for talks / debates

Make them as short and concise as possible, use smaller break-out groups and include representation of professional role models and relevant information on progression routes and careers for disabled young dancers.

Considerations for workshops

Consider length and pace of the workshops, ensure integration of disabled and non-disabled young dancers, ensure content is adaptable for different needs.

Ensure clear and appropriate language is used and be clear with group leaders regarding whether enablers/dance support workers are required and whose responsibility it is to provide them.

Considerations for performances

Exploring whether activities / run-throughs could be scheduled so that there are specific times when groups can inter-mingle, perhaps more informally

Ensure inclusive groups have extended technical rehearsal time if required and if possible arrange a visit to the venue in advance with the group leader and their group.

Potential for impact on the sector

U.Dance has the potential to be the catalyst for wider sector development including:

- Supporting integration between groups (and between disabled and non-disabled dancers)
- Programme facilitated debates engaging disabled and non-disabled young people in discussion together
- Part of the U.Dance programme should continue to involve commissions for performance projects including disabled and non-disabled youth dancers
- Brokerage / strengthening of contractual as well as network relationships between better resourced (e.g. NPO) and inclusion focused organisations,
Putting in place an inclusion 'mentor' / touchstone for organisers
Joint planning and working on associated development programmes, working with emerging groups raising their confidence, skills and/or aspirations
- Continuing to put in place inclusion specialists on panels and sharing issues arising to inform ongoing debate around development of the art form of integrated dance and inclusive practice
- Providing (potentially in partnership with others) initiatives such as more studio exploration / sharing of integrated choreographic practice and / or support packages for inclusive groups (or maybe 'go and see' budgets for inclusive group leaders) so they become more muscular in their integrated dance vocabulary
- Distributing pre / post-U.Dance links and information on integrated / inclusive practice so that youth dancers and group leaders can learn more about what / who is working inclusively at youth dance and professional level
- Continue to programme CPD events at U.Dance platforms as was done in 2015 (led by Plymouth Dance at some of the regional events and by YDE at the national event).

The full report is available from YDE by emailing u.dance@yde.org.uk

Guidelines are available to download here http://www.yde.org.uk/training_and_resources/guidance