



Face to Face - Consultation Report

South East Dance

August 2009



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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

During May and July 2009, South East Dance embarked on a period of consultation with stakeholders working with and in dance across the South East region. A total of four meetings collectively known as *Face to Face* were convened.

The aim of *Face to Face* was to provide an opportunity for the dance sector in the region to come together and discuss the challenges and development needs of the sector, whilst also providing an opportunity to connect, reconnect and network with peers, colleagues and potential partners.

The *Face to Face* meetings also provided South East Dance (SED) with an important opportunity to consider its position within the wider regional dance infrastructure. The outcome of these meetings will directly inform South East Dance's future programme.

Face to Face was open to anyone working in/with dance. Participants included artists, producers, independent managers, promoters, festivals, local authorities, venues, Higher and Further Education providers and representatives from the private sector. 124 people contributed to *Face to Face*, details of which have been attached as Appendix 1. Those unable to attend *Face to Face* meetings were invited to contribute via email.

1.2 Meeting structure

The agenda for *Face to Face* has been attached as Appendix 2. Following a brief introduction to South East Dance, providing an outline of South East Dance's current activity and future plans, participants were invited to take part in facilitated breakout sessions.

Each group was invited to respond to the following questions:-

- What are the key challenges for dance in the South East?
- What are the key development needs for dance in the South East?
- How might we work together to address some of the challenges?



- What might South East Dance's role be in addressing some of these challenges?

1.3 The report

Response to the questions outlined above, including notes from the surrounding discussion, form the basis of this report. This report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of SED, but seeks to capture those of regional stakeholders that attended *Face to Face*.

Given the range of participants involved, the report does not aim to capture every individual response, but rather focuses on common themes that emerged from the meetings. However, comments that identify challenges and issues linked to geographic specificity, not necessarily experienced by the sector as a whole, have been included.

1.4 Partners

SED would like to thank Oxford City Council, Oxford Dance Forum, Oxford Playhouse, The Point, Hampshire Dance, The Basement, Loop Dance Company and The Brook Theatre for working in partnership with SED to deliver *Face to Face*.

2. Challenges for dance in the South East

2.1 Creation space

People and space are essential components in the creation and presentation of, and participation in, dance.

It was widely acknowledged that whilst the South East has a critical mass of dance artists, space in which to create dance is far from adequate. A lack of dedicated space in the South East continues to be a major concern for the dance sector.

A number of artists reported that limited space within the South East often forces them to create work beyond their home base, frequently in another region. Whilst making little economic sense, this also raised concerns about the sustainability and development of the artistic community in the region.

Some artists and organisations operating in participatory settings reported that expectations from those taking part in dance work are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Although predominantly anecdotal, it was reported



that many participants are becoming reluctant to engage in activity housed in older and/or secondary spaces.

Whilst a number of participants at *Face to Face* commented on new spaces in development or recently completed in the region, many voiced concerns about affordability. Some of those consulted felt that these spaces would not be easily accessible to most emerging or smaller dance companies. Accessing affordable space was considered to be a major challenge within the region.

2.2 Geography

Although it was agreed that little could be done to counteract the geographical challenges inherent in the South East, it was felt the impact of a large region with a fragmented transport infrastructure had to be recognised. This was discussed both in terms of mobility in order to access dance opportunities, often with cost implications above and beyond travel expenses, but also the sense of isolation experienced by artists working in areas with no distinct artistic community.

Many of those operating beyond Brighton had a perception that South East Dance's work was too heavily focussed on activity taking place in Brighton. Although there was a general understanding that SED needed to be responsive to the critical mass of artists based in the city, participants requested increased support for organisations and artists across the region. *Flourish* was cited as a good example of how this might be achieved.

Some participants felt the merge of regions proposed by Arts Council England (ACE) could prove a challenge for dance in the South East. There was a concern that in order to respond to potential funding cuts, Arts Council England might look to further streamline the current dance portfolio. It was felt this would further dilute an already limited and vulnerable dance infrastructure within the region.

2.3 Connectivity

The scale of the region was also cited as a reason for sometimes limited connectivity between organisations and artists. A number of participants suggested that whilst a healthy range of dance activity was taking place, it was often operating in isolation or competition. Participants noted the apparent lack of cohesion and the challenges of working in an environment with a no strategic overview.

2.4 Continued professional development

Access to regular and high quality continued professional development (CPD) opportunities was widely considered to be a challenge. Although participants



felt there to be a number of providers, activity seemed inconsistent and disconnected. A number of artists reported that although an expensive option, they needed to access training in London.

Some participants felt there were limited opportunities and pathways of support for recent graduates, both in terms of creative and business development. There were also felt to be limited opportunities to encourage the retention of recent graduates from Higher Education within the region or encourage those completing conservatoire training to return to the region. This was seen to be an important in order to ensure the growth and ongoing development of the regions artistic community.

2.5 Risk averse

Some participants felt the South East to be risk averse and reported a challenge in presenting their work. It was noted that a number of artists based in the South East have strong international profiles, where challenging work is welcomed, yet find it impossible to secure performance opportunities in their home region. A number of artists cited the large amount of 'safe' work that was imported to the South East. Whilst some participants recognised the economic challenges of dance touring work and the difficulties venues faced in attracting audiences to 'high risk' work, there was concern that dance was being 'dumbed down'.

2.6 Funding

Although participants were steered away from dwelling on funding for dance, it was felt that this could not be ignored. A number of participants reported a concern that funding for dance was predominantly directed to activity that had a strong participatory focus at the expense of supporting wider art form development. Many artists and organisations felt that given the current political and financial climate this would only continue, providing a challenge for those creating more boundary pushing work.

2.7 Performance platforms

A number of artists and organisations reported a lack of opportunities to show work in progress and receive structured feedback through performance platforms. Whilst opportunities were recognised in both Oxford and Eastleigh, it was felt that was not sufficient for a region the size of the South East.

2.8 Management for dance artists

Many artists, and some of the smaller organisations, reported the ongoing challenge experienced in sourcing and sustaining appropriate management support. Whilst the portfolio nature of many dance artists has been widely



recognised, it was felt that artists are required to direct increasing amounts of time to administrate rather than create and deliver dance activity.

A number of organisations commented on the impact poor management can have on selecting work for presentation. Some organisations reported that they need to have confidence in an artist's management, and their understanding of the venue perspective, in order to develop and sustain an effective partnership and/or relationship.

3. Development needs for dance in the South East

3.1 Networks

A number of participants felt that enhanced networking opportunities would be of real benefit. Not only opportunities for the artistic community, but also for venues.

A number of organisations felt that whilst some of the larger organisations benefitted from engagement with national networks, resulting in enhanced partnership, skills share etc. similar opportunities for the smaller organisations were limited.

Some artists and organisations suggested that touring networks for the small and smaller middle scale venues would be useful in order to support a more cohesive, strategic and cost effective touring ecology within the region.

There was a consensus that partnership working across the region was ever more important, and essential in the current economic climate.

3.2 Profile

Participants agreed that dance needed to become far more sophisticated and articulate in communicating what it had to offer. A number of participants suggested that as a sector there was a real need to build a robust evidence base and collect meaningful case studies that could be shared for mutual benefit.

Some organisations reported a need to have one place where a comprehensive amount of information regarding the dance 'offer' of the region could be held. Some participants suggested the development of a publication, on line or printed, that provided an overview of dance in the South East.



A number of organisations suggested that as a sector dance has not been terribly effective in marketing and promoting itself, most notably the independent sector and smaller organisations. It was suggested that given the current public interest in dance a focus on communicating the added benefits of dance, in addition to promoting the art form in its own right, should be prioritised.

3.3 Mapping space

Given the lack of space outlined in section 2.1, a number of participants were keen to explore how alternative spaces might be accessed for creating or participating in dance. It was felt beneficial to complete a mapping of spaces that exist in Schools, Further Education, Leisure and Youth Services etc.

Although not a development need, a number of participants also cited Town Centre Initiatives as an interesting opportunity in order to address the current lack of space and questioned whether it might be possible to access empty premises for the creation and presentation of work. Whilst some participants felt concerned that this might perpetuate a sense that dance could 'make do' rather than argue the case of investment in dedicated space, there was a general feeling that in the current climate it was unlikely that significant investment would be made in developing new spaces. As such it was suggested that the sector should focus its energies to having better access to existing spaces.

3.4 Artist Support

In line with section 2.7 and 2.8, it was felt that more could be done to support independent artists. Programmes such as South East Dance's proposed Associate Artists programme and similar initiatives across the region were broadly welcomed. However a number of participants felt that some of these initiatives were short term interventions, whereas ongoing support over a period of time was needed.

It was also perceived that South East Dance had primarily supported Brighton based artists. It was felt by some that this was in conflict with its role and remit as a National Dance Agency where there was a need to balance its local, regional and national remit more effectively.

Some participants felt that larger organisations could be more creative in considering ways of supporting artists and smaller organisations. This was particularly the case for emerging artists where it was suggested that venues/programmers/Local Authorities could provide structured mentoring, access to contacts etc. as resource light support that would need no direct cash investment.



3.5 Response to regional demographic

Participants also noted the demographic of the region, suggesting that whilst there was a large amount of provision for young people, there was limited opportunity for the growing elderly population of the South East, particularly those based within more rural locations. Whilst it was recognised that a number of Local Authorities had made significant interventions in this area, provision was considered to be at best patchy and in need of development.

4. The changing role of South East Dance

4.1 Facilitator

There was a general desire for South East Dance to adopt a stronger role as facilitator, encouraging discussion and debate with a view to the development of strategic interventions that might or might not be delivered by the organisation. Participants broadly felt the role of South East Dance was to provoke, facilitate and respond.

4.2 Connector

Increased connectivity in the dance sector within the region was considered essential. Many participants felt the role of 'connector' to be central to South East Dance's future activity. It was proposed that this should be explored not only through the facilitation of networks outlined below, but also through more effective use of technology and on line resources.

The majority of participants welcomed networking opportunities such as *Face to Face*, and a number of those involved suggested South East Dance should lead on the delivery of an annual event that brought the dance sector together.

Networks such as Dance Infrastructure Group and Dance Partners South East were also valued and it was suggested that South East Dance lead in convening these groups. However some participants suggested a need to review and clarify existing models, ensuring the terms of reference for such groups were effectively shared and communicated.

4.3 Broker

Building on the above, South East Dance's role as a 'cultural broker' was seen to be important. For some artists and organisations this might be on a regional level, others on a more national or international level. However, in order to do so effectively it was considered essential that South East Dance



maintained a clear strategic overview of dance in the region in order to broker partnership within and beyond the dance sector.

4.4 Advocacy

It was widely considered that South East Dance should take on a stronger advocacy role for dance within and beyond the region. Although it was recognised that some organisations and artists are adequately supported to effectively advocate for their own work, the region lacked a clear voice that could advocate for the sector as a whole.

Given the current financial and political climate, the importance of raising the profile of dance in the South East was stressed. It was widely considered that the development needs of the sector needed to be strongly communicated, referencing a clear evidence base to lever support for the sector.

4.5 Art form development

There was a desire from participants to see South East Dance adopt a stronger leadership role in promoting art form development. Given comments outlined in section 2.5 – 2.8, there was a call for South East Dance to support the development of boundary pushing work contributing to both its creation and distribution within the South East.

Some organisations suggested that South East Dance should be playing an enhanced role in subsidising work that currently falls beyond the 'mainstream', which was perceived to receive adequate support from Local Authorities and Arts Council England.

4.6 Continued professional development (CPD)

Many participants felt that South East Dance should develop a strong focus on high-quality, well rounded and accessible training opportunities across the region. Whilst adopting a leadership role in this area, it was seen as essential that South East Dance develop CPD opportunities in close partnership with other providers.

A number of participants suggested that given the developments of dance in the region, it would be useful to undertake a CPD mapping exercise to establish the range and quality of existing provision.

Although many participants welcomed South East Dance's pilot professional development programme *Flourish*, a number of artists felt the programme to be prescriptive and suggested a more consultative approach to professional development. A number of those attending cited South East Dance's Screen Dance Fellowships as an interesting model of self determined CPD that could



be more widely utilised, embracing artists working beyond moving image based practice.

4.7 Information and knowledge transfer

Many participants felt South East Dance could develop a stronger role as a portal for information, which would further enhance its role as a connector for dance in the South East. The specific requests in this area were too broad to outline in this report and ranged from developing such initiatives as a data base of international venues to providing email updates on local funding opportunities.

The role of South East Dance as a signpost to other artists and organisations was greatly valued, as was its advisory role. However, there were also suggestions that South East Dance could better publicise these areas of its work, perhaps through a more structured approach to services.

It was felt important for South East Dance to hold and share a breadth of knowledge regarding developments in dance within and beyond the region. Whilst participants appreciated that South East couldn't be all things to all people, it could strengthen its role as an effective intelligence hub.

4.8 Leadership

In line with comments above, there was a clear desire for South East Dance to take on a stronger leadership role for dance in the South East, moving away from an emphasis on advocating and delivering its own projects. Many participants suggested that it would be important for South East Dance to manage expectations. Clear communication of its priorities would be critical to success and strengthened partnerships.

5. Final thoughts

5.1 The health of dance

Face to Face gave a clear sense that dance, although facing a number of challenges, is a vibrant contributor to the regional arts ecology. It is driven by some passionate, if in some cases under resourced, artists and organisations.

However, the region remains disconnected. In some areas pockets of activity are operating and being delivered in isolation, with little coherent strategy for long term development.

5.2 Profile



Perhaps due to the disconnection outlined above, dance in the South East generally suffers from limited profile both within and beyond the region. As with all things, there are notable exceptions, although these are primarily related to local activity delivered by artists or organisations with limited capacity to signal their presence to the wider sector. This low profile continues, despite a range of high quality and in many cases innovative programmes of activity.

5.3 Leadership

There is clearly a need to develop regional leadership for dance within the South East. This was a repeated conclusion of *Face to Face* meetings, where it was considered essential in order to fully realise the potential and diversity of dance in the region within a developing infrastructure.

Whilst South East Dance welcomes an opportunity to further develop its leadership role, the development of dance in the region must be seen as a collective responsibility.

Sharing expertise, working in partnership and working together to advocate for dance in the South East is essential to the future health of the sector.

5.4 Dance in 5 years time

As part of *Face to Face*, South East Dance invited participants to describe how they hoped dance in the South East would look in 5 years time.

Aspirations are high, as they should be.

Broadly speaking there was a desire for dance to be continually evolving, connected, inclusive and adventurous. The development of a coherent infrastructure, that can accommodate a range of activity from starting steps to experimental and internationally significant.

6. Appendix

Appendix 1
Sample Agenda

South East Dance
Face to Face



- 5.00pm **Arrivals and networking**
Meet peers, colleagues and associates from across the region
- 5.30pm **Welcome and introductions** (Jamie Watton)
- 5.35pm **All change at South East Dance** (Jamie Watton and South East Dance team)
What is happening at South East Dance?
What are South East Dance's current priorities?
What will South East Dance look like and what might it offer in the future?
- 5.50pm **The Dance Soapbox** (facilitated break out groups)
Have your say - what are the challenges, issues and opportunities for dance in the South East?
Training, audience development, funding, connectivity?
- 6.40pm **Working in partnership** (facilitated break out groups)
How might we work together to tackle some of these challenges?
What might South East Dance's role be in this?
What do you need most from South East Dance?
- 7.20pm **Summary and next steps**
- 7.30pm **Close**

Appendix 2

Face To Face – list of participants

Oxford

Gwen Van Spijk
Rachel Pedley

-Independent Producer, Manager & Consultant
-Dance performer & Project Coordinator for Vale of White Horse



Danny Scott	-Phoenix Arts
Anjali Dance Company	-Dance Company
Michelle Dickson	-Director, Oxford Playhouse
Nicky Everett	-The Lift, Creative Services
Joelle Pappas	-Director, Tac-Au-Tac Dance Theatre
Miranda Laurence	-Student, Oxford University
Barbara Scragg	-Dance & keep-fit teacher
Janie Potter	-Teacher of chair-based movement to elderly
Maria Ryan	-Dance Education Programmer, Wycombe Swan
Susie Crow	-Independent Ballet Choreographer
Vicky Fisher	-Lecturer in Dance at Oxford & Cherwell Valley College
Susan Norwood	-Project Volume
Claire Thompson	-Dance Officer, Oxford City Council
Jane Connelly	
Joe Bates	-Independent Arts Manager
Rhiannon Lewis	-Emerging freelance Dance Manager
Gary Shenton	

South East Dance staff:

Charlotte Semlyen	-Business & Development Director
Rowena Price	-Marketing Administrator
Catherine Gill	-Projects Coordinator (moving Voices)
Emily James	-Projects Coordinator
Jamie Watton	-CEO/Artistic Director

Eastleigh

Joanne Cone	-Freelance Dance Practitioner
Janet Mein	-Head of Hampshire Arts Services
Tracie Gooch	-Teacher of Salsa and Argentine Tango
Vicki Hargreaves	-Dance Administrator, The Point
Jo Shapland	-Multidisciplinary, site sensitive performance and screen dance artist
Cat Casbon	-Dance Associate, South Hill Park
Kim Johnson	-Dance Development Manager, The Point
Lucy Frazer	-Director, Hampshire Dance
Anna Brown	-Artist Development Coordinator, Hampshire Dance
Jan De Schynkel	-Dance Officer, Arts Council England, South East



South East Dance staff:

Vicky Bloor	-Head of Screen Dance
Emily James	-Projects Coordinator
Jamie Watton	-CEO/Artistic Director

Brighton

Pippa Smith	-Head of Education, Brighton Dome
Rachel Gibson	-Independent Arts Consultant
Maria Lloyd	-
Hilary Lane	-County Arts Officer, East Sussex County Council
Yael Flexer	-Live performance & digital installation artist
Liz Aggiss	-Screen Dance Artist
Hannah Wheeler	-Freelance Dance Practitioner and Arts Manager
Mark Ward	-Ex-Pro dancer, Dance agent
Carina Westling	-
Amarita Vargas	-Flamenco dancer and teacher
Madeleine Wallner	-Dance teacher
Susan Eskdale	- Freelance Arts and projects Manager
Sarah Alexander	-freelance Dance Practitioner
Laura Woods	-Dance Development Officer, BHCC
Bob Lockyer	-Chair of South East Dance Board of Trustees
CiCi Blumstein	-Freelance Dance Artist
Lisa Handy	-PE teacher & school sports coordinator
Urja Thakore	-Indian classical dancer, choreographer & teacher
Jen McLachlan	-Dance Director
Billy Cowie	-Freelance artist & filmmaker
Lucy Cash	-Screen dance artist
Clara García Fraile	-
Claire Soper	-Freelance project manager, programmer & tour producer
Rosaria Gracia	-Dance artist
Judith Hibberd	-Head of Performing Arts, Arts Council England, South East

South East Dance staff:

Sharon Duggal	-Head of Communications
Hannah Oliver	-Screen Dance Intern
Catherine Long	-Finance and Office Administrator
Emily James	-Projects Coordinator
Jamie Watton	-CEO/Artistic Director



Chatham

Jeanette Brookes	-Artistic Director, Hextable Dance
Luci Napleton	-Dance Development Worker, Medway Council
Cathy Westbrook	
Malti Patel	-Dance Artist
Jane Metcalf	
Chris Francis	-Dance teacher
Angela Pickard	
Marion Dawson	
Richard Russell	-Arts Council England
Jayne Dunn	
Sam McCaffrey	
Michelle Chorley	
Nina Atkinson	-Artistic Director, Loop Dance Company
Louisa Pestell	
Ian Fuller	-Hastings Excellence Cluster
Louise Denton	
Pam Howard	
Becky Milstead	
Nick Chapman	-Executive Director, Woking Dance Festival
Sandra Pamplin	
Sharon Whiffin	
Lucy Lungley	
Marie Forbes	-Loop Dance Company
Kate Scott	-Loop Dance Company
Caroline Lofthouse	
<u>South East Dance staff:</u>	
Judith Packer	-Business & Development Director
Kyla Lucking	-Head of Community & Learning
Catherine Long	-Finance & Office Administrator
Emily James	-Projects Coordinator
Jamie Watton	-CEO/Artistic Director