

# The Role and Impact of Freelancers in the UK Dance Sector

## Brief report

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## Foreword

Central to our mission is understanding the needs of the sector and providing the support the sector needs to thrive. We commissioned researchers to undertake an analysis of the role and impact of freelancers in the dance sector as the most recent data available to us on the dance-specific workforce is 10 years old and estimated that at least 40,000 people worked in dance at that point in time. Over the past decade dance has gained in popularity. *Big Dance 2012* was the largest UK-wide dance programme ever, involving 5.7 million people. Over 10 million people watched the launch night of BBC One's *Strictly Come Dancing*, said to be the biggest audience for a series debut, and government figures show that 76 per cent of adults engage in the arts, and over 17 per cent engage in dance. Whilst arts subjects in schools and resulting examination entries have been in decline, dance remains a popular subject in Higher Education with approximately 4,500 new graduates every year.

As a Sector Support Organisation, a membership organisation and the advocacy body representing the interests of those engaged in dance education, production and performance, it is vital that we understand the needs of our members and the support the sector more broadly needs in order to achieve our vision for a stronger, more vibrant, more diverse future for dance. Now more than ever we need to use data to present evidence-based arguments when we champion the power of and the need for dance in people's lives. The UK's creative industries are world-renowned and the latest government figures show that they are worth nearly £100 billion a year to the UK economy, employing almost 2 million people (more than 1 in 20 of UK jobs). Recent Department for Digital, Culture,

Media and Sport figures indicate that the workforce for the UK's performing arts sector is now over 225,000. Freelance and portfolio working is more and more commonplace in the creative industries and may account for up to 85% of the workforce. This is only likely to increase in the future.

The freelance workforce for dance is **highly educated** and **skilled, passionate** and **persistent in achieving long-term goals, contributes to communities and society** in multiple ways, **benefits the economy**, and has **high levels of wellbeing**, particularly in terms of personal growth and purpose in life. However, there are some clear challenges that we will work with partners to address: **not all roles are visible and valued equally; access to support networks** is particularly important but not yet optimal; freelancers need to be empowered in **articulating worth and value** to those within and outside the dance sector; a better **understanding of contractual and other benefits** is needed; and **negotiation of pay** is problematic and not always reflective of levels of skill, experience and preparation for the work.

### Thanks and acknowledgements

This piece of research is commissioned by One Dance UK with support from Arts Council England and the Dance Professionals Fund and has been carried out by a team of researchers from the University of Bedfordshire – our thanks and gratitude go to all of them, and the steering group who helped guide the research.

**Andrew Hurst**  
Chief Executive

# 1.

## Introduction

Freelance working in the dance sector is defined as individuals working on a self-employed basis, selling work or services by the hour, day or job, rather than on a permanent salaried basis. This includes individuals working as performers, creators, teachers, managers, producers, healthcare providers and researchers, or any combination of these, in a portfolio career. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), there are currently 21,000 dancers and choreographers working in the UK, of whom 17,000 are self-employed. Freelancers take on a range of roles in the dance sector, driving the art form forward and delivering across various sectors and communities including arts and culture, education, leisure and tourism, and health and social care. However, the ad hoc nature of their work has meant there is little evidence of their activity to inform how the dance sector develops in response to their needs.

To begin this research, a number of recent surveys and reports were collated to paint a picture of working life in the dance and creative arts sectors, and to assess gaps in existing knowledge (CEBR, 2013, 2017; Cox & Crone, 2014; HESA, 2018; Katerega, 2019; People Dancing, 2016; PiPA, 2018; Revelli, 2018). According to these reports, in 2015, the arts and culture as a whole employed an estimated 131,200 people in the UK,

with performing arts (including dance) recognised as the largest contributor, amounting to 35% of total employment in the arts and culture. Survey respondents reported peer and professional networks are crucial for artistic development, both for practice and discovering opportunities. Participants felt that their expertise was appreciated by employers, commissioners, and those engaged in the work (such as workshop or class attendees), but that the potential benefits of their work were not fully understood. Throughout these reports, similar concerns were raised about low rates of pay and salaries, financial instability and managing work-life balance.

Despite these concerns, the benefits associated with this work seem to outweigh the costs for many individuals. A recent research project (Aujla & Farrer, 2016) adopted a psychological framework to examine the experiences of independent dancers. Participants reported being motivated by artistic development and a desire for autonomy, feeling fulfilled by their work and satisfied that they were making a contribution to their field, or society. Psychological characteristics such as optimism, self-confidence and self-awareness enabled them to overcome some of the previously outlined challenges and remain resilient to the demands of the role.

Previous reports and surveys provide a valuable context for better understanding the particular challenges of working in the arts, however, there is very limited evidence that focuses specifically on the freelance dance sector and, in particular, no up-to-date large-scale survey of this workforce. The aim of this research was to gather qualitative and quantitative data focusing on three key strands:

- **Working Lives:** Updating knowledge and statistics about typical roles in a freelance and/or portfolio career, evaluating organisational support structures and services, and how they can best respond to the needs of freelance workers
- **Economic Contributions:** Gaining insight into the economic contributions of freelance workers to their communities and the wider UK economy
- **Wellbeing and Resilience:** Investigating freelancers' wellbeing and resilience, which may be requisite for sustaining a portfolio career



Each strand of the research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Research Institute for Media, Art and Performance at the University of Bedfordshire. All participants were provided with information detailing the aims and processes of the research, as well as assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of all data collected, and were required to sign informed consent. Participants were informed that they could omit any question they were not comfortable answering or withdraw from the study at any time. All data obtained was stored on password protected computers.

This brief report provides an overview of each of the three research strands, including methodology and findings, before summarising the results to celebrate the strengths of the sector and suggest ways to support freelancers in the future.

# 2.

## Working Lives of Freelancers

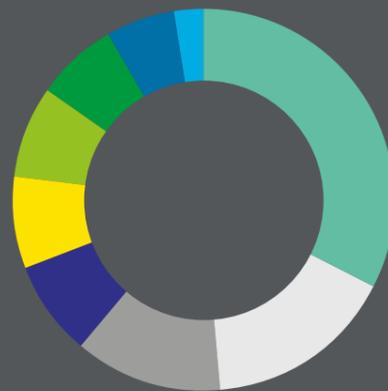
This section reports on a range of factors including the demographics of the sample, their training history, income, working patterns, support needs, as well as organisational perspectives on the role of freelancers. Data was collected via an online survey of 499 participants (405 female, 84 male, 4 non-binary or gender fluid respondents, with a mean age of  $37.24 \pm 11.93$  years)<sup>1</sup>. The number of participants for each survey section varied. We received 276 fully completed surveys. The survey findings were supplemented by focus groups and interviews with 14 current freelancers (12 female, 2 male), four former freelancers (all female), and seven female organisational representatives.

### Demographics and Training History

The majority of survey respondents were British (77.53%) and a smaller number were from other parts of the world including Europe and America. Most participants were based in England, and figure 1 represents the regions in which those respondents lived.

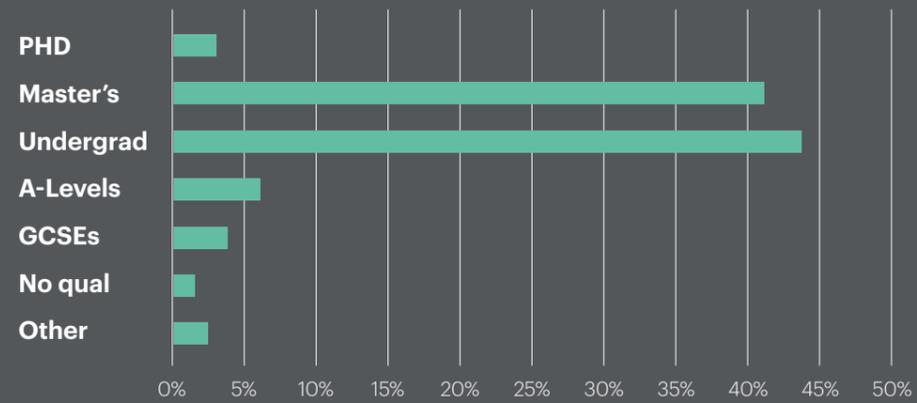
Figure 1: Geographic locations of participants based in England.

● London	<b>32.65%</b>
● South East	<b>16.1%</b>
● South West	<b>12.47%</b>
● Yorkshire and the Humber	<b>8.16%</b>
● East	<b>7.71%</b>
● East Midlands	<b>7.71%</b>
● North West	<b>7.03%</b>
● West Midlands	<b>5.67%</b>
● North East	<b>2.49%</b>



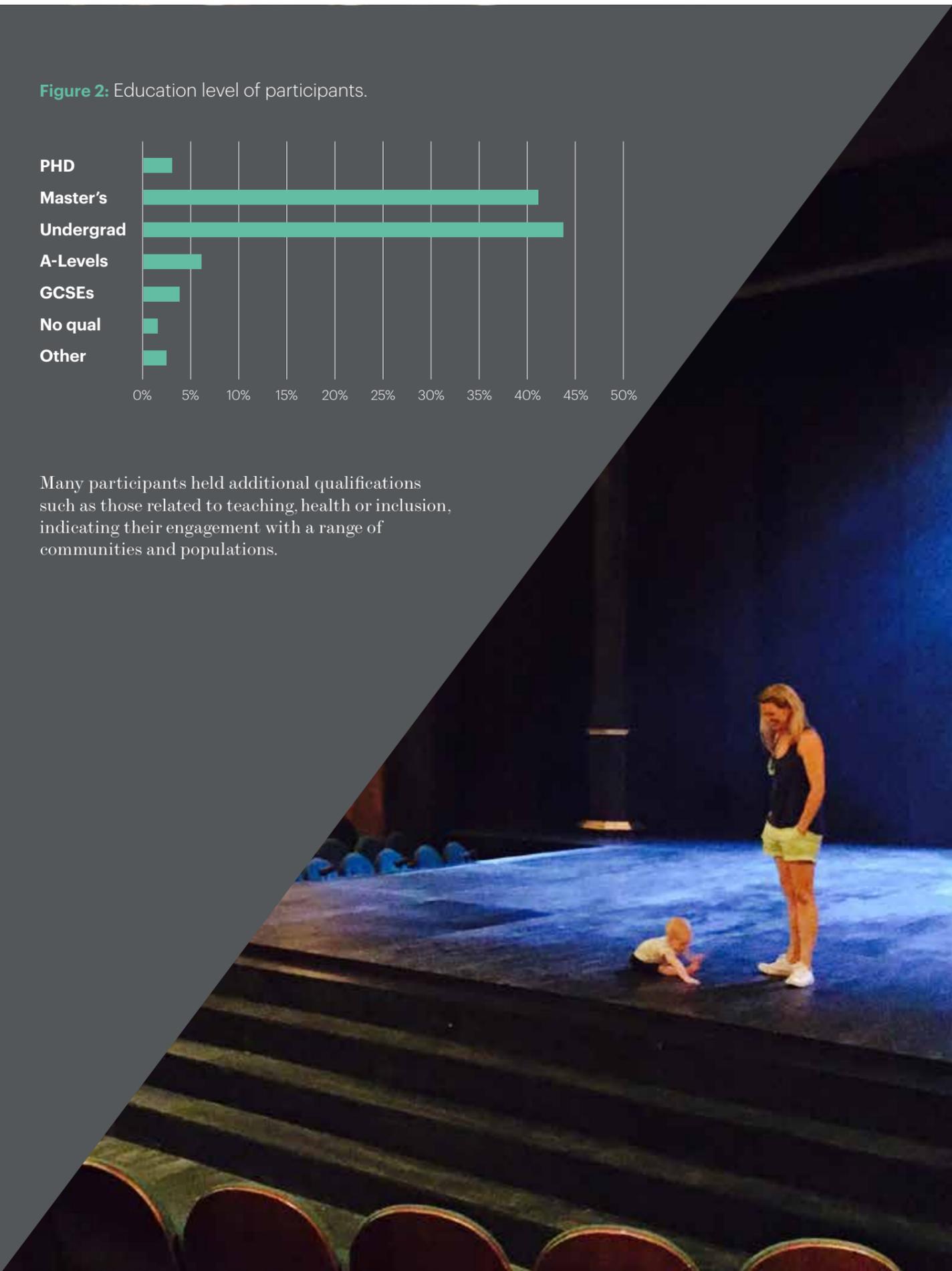
A broad range of training histories was reported, with participants having spent an average of 8.93 years ( $\pm 7.81$ ) in training, although this ranged from 0-56 years. Figure 2 shows that overall, participants were highly educated, with over 40% holding a Master's degree.

Figure 2: Education level of participants.



Many participants held additional qualifications such as those related to teaching, health or inclusion, indicating their engagement with a range of communities and populations.

<sup>1</sup>Values following the  $\pm$  symbol show the standard deviation, which represents the extent to which participants' scores differed from the mean. A low standard deviation indicates that scores were close to the mean value, while a large standard deviation indicates a larger spread of responses.



## Household and Financial Considerations

Almost two thirds of participants (63.84%) reported receiving financial or in-kind support from family members or friends to support their education or freelance work in dance. Just under half of participants (48.28%) had received a scholarship or bursary towards their education and training, including student loans, bursaries from arts or dance networks, and scholarships provided by the government, NHS and academic institutions. A quarter of freelancers reported having at least one dependent, most of whom were under the age of 22 years.

In terms of income, tables 1 and 2 show the participants' total annual household income followed by their income from freelance work in the dance sector, which accounted for 31.48% of the household total.

**Table 1:** Total household income.

Annual household income (£)	
Minimum income	500
Maximum income	200,000
Average (standard deviation)	37,069.98 (± 28,597.41)

**Table 2:** Total income from freelance dance work.

Annual freelance dance income (£)	
Minimum income	100
Maximum income	45,000
Average (standard deviation)	11,669.74 (± 8551.81)

Focus group participants generally reported dissatisfaction with rates of pay. One explained:

“

*I think as a freelancer you're often trying to argue what the value of your work is, in order to get a fee that is realistic.*

”

Respondents reported that fees were too low, did not account for preparation and travel time, and often did not increase commensurate with experience level.

“

*In other lines of work, your pay rate would go up with your experience and skills, however with performance work, a lot of the time it's still the same rate ten years later.*

”

Analyses of survey data revealed that a similar average yearly income was reported by freelancers with an undergraduate degree (or equivalent) and those with a postgraduate qualification. Freelancers identifying as mid-career reported the highest average income per year, and those in the earlier stages of their career reported the lowest annual average.

## Roles

Many of the survey respondents considered their main job to be teaching, performing or choreography, but they generally took on several roles within a wider portfolio of work.

“

*I go as 'independent dance artist', so I work as a choreographer, work as a performer, work as a mentor, teacher, director, facilitator, public speaker.*

”

Participants were asked to respond to questions based on the work they had undertaken in the last 30 days to provide a snapshot of working life in the sector. Most participants (62.62%) reported working freelance in a part-time capacity, and 38.32% considered themselves to be full-time. The most common time commitment given to all roles was 1 to 5 hours per week, although for management roles, 6-10 hours per week was reported as frequently. Low rates of pay were evident: the most common levels of pay for the 30-day period were between £100-500 for each role. Reported benefits varied across roles and fewer than 10% of roles provided benefits as part of their terms. Roles in teaching and education were the most likely to provide benefits, whereas participants undertaking personal administration and mentorship did not receive any benefits as part of this work. Roles in the dance sector were performed in a variety of settings and contexts, such as part of self-managed projects and companies, educational institutions, community contexts or in participants' own homes.





Table 3 gives an indication of these roles and the additional activities undertaken as part of them, which are often unacknowledged.

**Table 3:** Roles, activities, and most common income range as reported by freelancers

Role (example of role type)	Example of additional activities	Most commonly reported income range (over 30 days)
<b>Teaching/Education</b> e.g. lecturing in Higher Education, teaching in schools or private studios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson planning</li> <li>Choreography</li> <li>Meetings</li> <li>Research</li> </ul>	£100-£250
<b>Performance</b> e.g. commercial, musical theatre, circus, company-based events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rehearsing</li> <li>Administration</li> <li>Training</li> </ul>	£250-£500
<b>Choreography/Making</b> e.g. stage performances, film, commercial work, one-off projects, syllabus creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research</li> <li>Rehearsing</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>Event management</li> </ul>	£250-£500
<b>Administration</b> e.g. informal or formal work for company, organisation or institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning</li> <li>Article writing</li> <li>Accounting</li> <li>Publicity</li> </ul>	Voluntary/unpaid
<b>Producing</b> e.g. creative producers, executive producers, production managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration</li> <li>Budgeting</li> <li>Writing proposals</li> <li>Writing funding applications</li> <li>Market research</li> </ul>	Voluntary/unpaid
<b>Facilitation/Leading</b> e.g. community dance practitioners, artists, facilitators, workshop leaders, movement practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning</li> <li>Research</li> <li>Directing rehearsals</li> <li>Supporting staff</li> </ul>	£100-£250
<b>Personal Administration</b> e.g. administration activities conducted for own business/work in various roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budgeting</li> <li>Invoicing</li> <li>Website/social media</li> <li>Networking</li> </ul>	Voluntary/unpaid



Image © DanceXchange Birmingham, Class Programme

Role (example of role type)	Example of additional activities	Most commonly reported income range (over 30 days)
<b>Management</b> e.g. management of projects, programmes, tours, events, stage productions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fundraising</li> <li>Tour booking</li> <li>Marketing</li> <li>Budget management</li> <li>Networking</li> </ul>	£100-£250
<b>Artistic Director</b> e.g. in dance companies, schools and residencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>Choreography</li> <li>Planning</li> <li>Research</li> </ul>	Voluntary to £750-£1000
<b>Consultancy</b> e.g. adjudication, advising, recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>Administration</li> <li>Observation</li> </ul>	£100-500
<b>Directing</b> e.g. directors of movement, stage production, rehearsals, one-off projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rehearsing</li> <li>Administration</li> <li>Planning</li> <li>Research</li> </ul>	£100-£250
<b>Healthcare</b> e.g. massage therapy, counselling, psychotherapy, movement therapies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>Rehabilitation</li> </ul>	Under £100 to £250-£500
<b>Mentorship</b> e.g. formal or informal work with youth, organisations, educational institutions or professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support</li> <li>Youth work</li> <li>Counselling</li> <li>Coaching</li> <li>Evaluation</li> </ul>	£100-£250
<b>Miscellaneous roles</b> e.g. research, photography, filmmaking, music, costume design, stage technician, lighting design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration</li> <li>Networking</li> <li>Meetings</li> <li>Planning</li> </ul>	Voluntary/unpaid



“

*I would like to try and shatter that notion of bigger is better and if you're with a high-profile company, that means you're successful, because I think that just breeds insecurity... there's only so many jobs for those high profile companies and if you don't get a job with that then what, you're a failure or you haven't succeeded?*

”

Previous research highlighted that tacit hierarchies pervade the dance sector even if they are not endorsed by those working in it (Aujla & Farrer, 2016). Specifically, paid directors and choreographers were perceived as most successful in the sector, followed by performers in well-known companies, then Higher Education and vocational educators and unpaid performers and choreographers, with teachers in schools and the community seen as least successful. Focus group participants felt that these perceptual attitudes may originate during training, and that the media plays a large role in how successful the work of certain groups or individuals is perceived as being. Some suggested that the level of ‘visibility’ of work and whether or not an individual’s name is attached to it had become a measure of success. Attitudes towards success were also sometimes seen as being rooted in the culture surrounding dance, which led to frustration for some respondents that work is not always considered successful unless it is high profile.

Just like the participants in previous research (Aujla & Farrer, 2016), freelancers themselves considered personal markers of success as more important than visibility in the dance sector.

### Contributions to Communities and Society

Although some freelancers found articulating the value of their work challenging, our discussions with focus group participants revealed clear examples of how their work in dance contributed to both their local communities and the dance sector more broadly. Across many of the described roles, freelancers seemed to use their interaction with others, either in person or through the creative focus of the work, to reflect or comment on social issues, break down perceived barriers, enhance wellbeing and inspire others. As participants described their perceptions regarding the impact of their work, several key themes emerged:

**Table 4:** Freelancers’ contributions to their communities, society and the wider dance sector

#### Changing attitudes and addressing social issues

“

*Art can create change and dance can be a brilliant medium to change perceptions and preconceptions about what dance and theatre can be.*

“

*I tend to use subject matters that comment on political and social issues that are affecting the world that we live in.*

“

#### Promoting cultural exchange

*I would say that I also contributed to the wider European scene and wider European audiences and the idea of international exchange... It's something about breaking down barriers and broadening social connections.*

“

#### Supporting other artists

*I did a lot of mentoring, facilitating roles for young artists and I think that's been terrific in, you know, it's been a learning experience for me but it helps to support them to find ways to grow their own voices.*

“

#### Promoting health and wellbeing

*It's contributing to the health and strength and wellbeing, which of course takes costs off the NHS, and then even mental health.*

Responses illustrate the multiple impacts freelancers have on a range of sectors and communities, including: helping to develop not only their local arts scene but audiences in general, which also involved actively reaching out to those who had not previously engaged with dance; nurturing and inspiring the next generation of artists and supporting peers by acting as mentors and contributing to provision of professional development; creating and facilitating cross cultural exchanges, both internationally and

through local cultural heritage activity; and providing health benefits for participants. Even where some freelancers were less able to articulate the impact of their work, they acknowledged their role fulfilled a purpose, whether that be to entertain or to add to the collective voice of freelancers in the sector, strengthening calls for support.

The findings in table 4 paint a picture of the rich and widespread impact of the freelance dance workforce, especially when considered alongside the ‘Economic Contributions of Freelancers’ section later in this report. Greater recognition by employers and collaborators within and outside of the dance sector of the potential benefits of this work may help empower freelancers to articulate the value of their work more confidently.

### Work-life Patterns

Many freelancers characterised the nature of their work as continuously intensive:

“

*There's a lot of anxiety and insecurities surrounding the nature of freelance work and because there's such little work out there, when you're being offered it, you snatch their hand off because it's there and it's money and it's work and it's an opportunity.*

*You actually don't have a day off and you burn out and you can't do the work to the best of your ability.*

Although some participants felt that their workload had a detrimental impact on their personal lives and relationships, others actively developed methods to balance their work. Participants who used to work freelance reported missing the autonomy of scheduling and job choice which are characteristic of freelance work. However, some mentioned noticing a large shift in their work-life balance as their current work time was confined to scheduled hours. One ex-freelancer explained:

“

*I feel really refreshed, I don't feel tired. I see my family so much more, I see my friends so much more.*

”



Dani Bower Dancers Kayleigh Bestington and Alana Brooks

### Finding Work

Social connections play an important role in the success of freelancers, as word of mouth and networking are primary methods by which the participants found work. Although some freelancers reported that joining groups or networks could be potentially intimidating, they identified their existing connections with peers, mentors and colleagues as valued sources of guidance.

“

*I suppose really the main one actually are all the freelancers... Yes, there's all kinds of support, financial, creative, emotional, strategic, that we are able to give to each other.*

”

Freelance workers also find work through online job listings, social media forums and, less commonly, through e-newsletters or directly approaching venues or organisations.

“

*When I was first starting out, I did a lot of just contacting people to see if they were interested in having a conversation and then maybe as a result of that, something would come up more formally*

”

### Focus on Income

The average annual income from freelance work reported by participants was £11,669.74 ( $\pm$  8,551.81), which is well below the national average of £28,677 (ONS, 2018). It is therefore unsurprising that many of the participants took on additional work to supplement their income from the freelance dance sector.

Most participants were paid for their freelance work in the dance sector, with very few (5.56%) stating that between 91-100% of their work was conducted on a voluntary, or unpaid, basis. Although rates of pay varied widely, participants appeared to earn more from this work than freelance work they conducted outside of the dance sector. However, one of the most common financial challenges identified by both experienced and early career freelancers was negotiating their rate of pay. Many of them felt that this was due to the limited awareness of the amount of effort that is required to complete a role or project.

“

*For me the most important thing is the people really, that people who are employing freelancers really understand the circumstances of freelancers, whilst everybody who's employing the freelancer wants the best deal possible and they want as much as possible for as cheap as possible, it becomes totally unsustainable for a freelancer, and you do feel a lot of the time that you're having to argue your worth and your value... There needs to be education for people who work with freelancers.*

”

### Three-month Tracking

Due to the variable nature of freelance work, online survey respondents were invited to participate in a three-month tracking period of surveys to create a more detailed picture of freelancers' working lives. Fluctuations in pay for work, both within and outside of the freelance dance sector, were observed over the three-month period. Within the freelance dance sector, the most commonly reported levels of income were in the £500 to £750 range in December and January, and £750 to £1000 range in November and December.

Almost one-third of respondents also undertook additional work outside the freelance dance sector in various contexts such as teaching, administration and production. For freelance work outside the dance sector, the most frequently reported level of income was in January, in the under £100 and £1000-1500 ranges. For employed work in the dance sector, freelancers' most frequently reported income level was in both November and January, in the £1000-1500 range. However, it is important to note that throughout the three-month period, only a maximum of a 25% of freelancers reported numbers in these ranges, and the largest proportion of income received each month fell across ranges below £1000 per month.

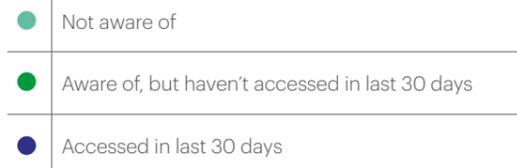


Additionally, the most common roles undertaken by freelancers were within teaching and education, which dictated many participants' schedules according to the academic year. It could be assumed that this may therefore be a factor affecting the decrease in income observed in December of the three-month tracking period, which aligns with Christmas holidays and a potential reduction in work opportunities or commitments.

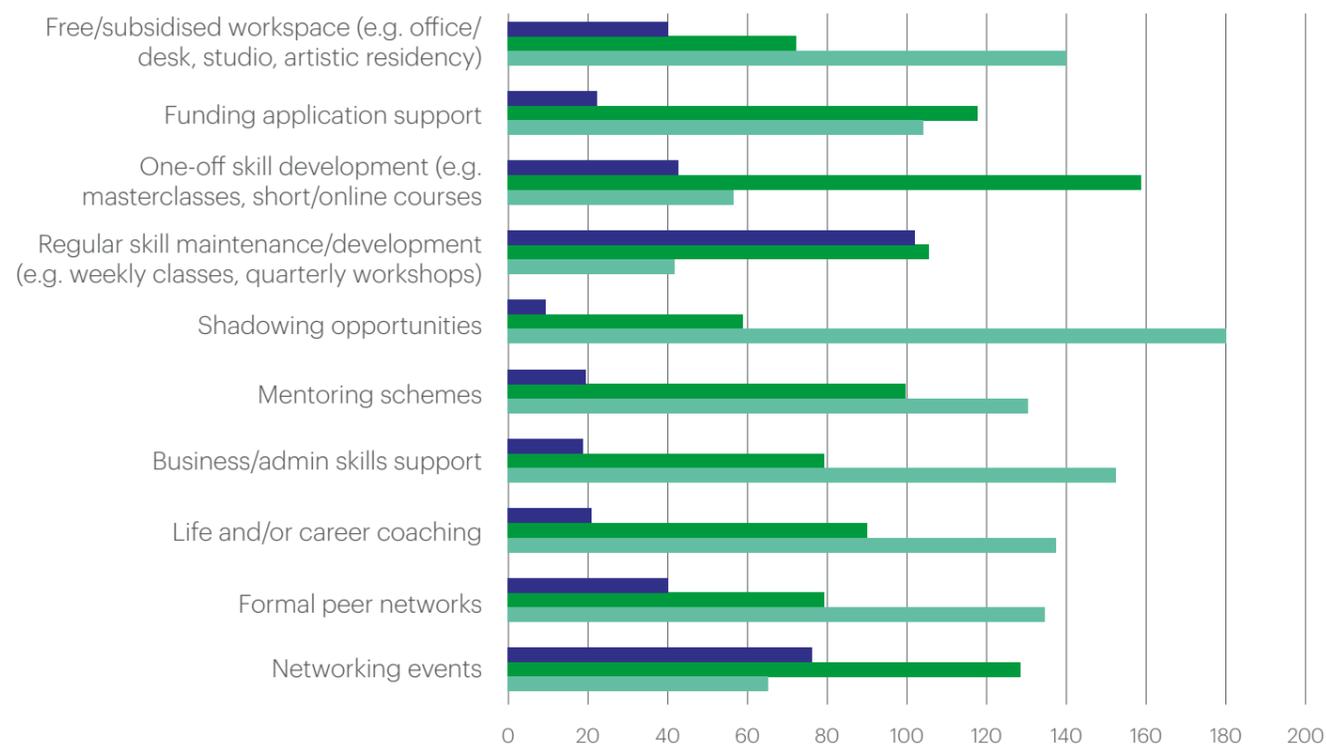
Hours per month dedicated to freelance work within the dance sector did not fluctuate greatly within the lower time ranges, but increased in the 61-80 hours per month range from November to December and through January. From December to January, there was an almost twofold increase of those completing over 100 hours of freelance dance sector work over the month.

## Support

Freelancers were asked about their awareness of and access to different support services in their region in the last 30 days and the results can be seen in the chart below.



**Figure 3:** Awareness and use of sources of support.



When examining these results in further detail, a third of participants (33.75%) accessed regular skill maintenance and development on a weekly basis. An additional 12.14% of participants made use of free or subsidised work spaces each week. Networking events were attended by just under half of participants (46.49%) on an annual basis.

Organisational support reported by freelancers came largely from membership organisations as well as regional dance agencies, arts venues, dance companies, studios and cultural spaces, art councils, networks (both artist- and organisation-led), arts development organisations, educational establishments and local authorities. These organisations offered varying combinations of information and advice, studio space, funding support, and opportunities for continuing professional development, networking and mentoring.

When asked what areas of support they would find useful that were not currently available to them, freelancers most frequently cited support related to business and administration as a need. This included personnel (interns, producers, project managers, etc.), finance-related guidance, help writing funding applications and other forms of business development. This was followed by a desire for more affordable professional development opportunities such as regular classes, courses and training in specific areas of practice.

Networking and relationship-building opportunities were also referenced, and many freelancers indicated a desire for mentoring and shadowing opportunities to support their development. There was a strong call for financial support (be it direct or through subsidised continued professional development) and this included



a desire for fairer pay, as well as more funding provision for artists overall. Participants also indicated a need for low cost studio and work space.

When examined by career stage, results revealed that after administrative and business support needs, which were equally important for all groups, early career freelancers expressed a particular desire for studio or work spaces, and networking opportunities. Mid-career participants would most value more available and/or affordable continuing professional development, while late career respondents expressed a desire for financial and funding support, and mentoring or coaching opportunities. A freelance performer commented:

“  
*I'd like to have a child in the next ten years but I don't want to feel afraid to do so.*  
 ”

In addition to the main survey findings, focus group participants highlighted a need for increased support around healthcare and wellbeing for freelance workers, greater provision of online resources and better support for parents working freelance in the arts.

Freelancers and support organisations also require an effective method of communication regarding available support and opportunities. Participants indicated their preferred communication formats as emails or e-newsletters (78%), or via social media (51%).

A small number of respondents mentioned they found in-person networking meetings, website postings and noticeboards to be valuable sources of information.

## Organisational Perspectives

A network of 64 regularly funded dance organisations (National Portfolio Organisations; NPOs) works across the UK as an infrastructure to support and galvanise those working in the arts. These are further underpinned by many independent arts organisations, training schools, and dance companies who self-fund or apply for funding on a project-to-project basis. Organisations can play a crucial role in supporting freelancers in their careers, for example, one choreographer highlighted the support he had received from an NPO:

“  
*...without them, I simply would have not carved out the career that I've had, they supported me massively in the early days, in terms of rehearsal space and performance opportunities and mentoring and guidance.*  
 ”

To examine this important aspect of the sector, we interviewed a range of individuals who worked for arts organisations across the UK to gain insight into their understanding of, and provision of support for, the freelance workforce.

Many of the organisational representatives that we spoke to described creating jobs for freelancers and relying on them to deliver work through their projects and programmes. As a result, they recognised their role in nurturing and supporting freelancers throughout various stages of their careers, although they described challenges in being able to consistently offer development opportunities.

“

*So we're very welcoming to any professionals in the sector... It's quite an all-round level of support that we give. What we recognise is that we depend really heavily on the freelancers that are delivering our projects, so we try to be quite thoughtful in how we use those people.*

As the freelance sector becomes increasingly project-based, with individuals' roles and responsibilities elevated to encompass their own project management and entrepreneurialism, resources are being stretched to meet an increased demand for support. One interviewee explained:

“

*The demand is huge and I can't meet it... for example in the last week, I've had seven requests for meetings.*

”

Implementation of various strategies to address this lack of resources became evident throughout the interviews. Many of the organisational representatives described setting up practical support, including CPD courses, First Aid courses and funding talks. They recognised that pooling resources and bringing together groups of individuals provide not only cost-effective ways of supporting the sector, but also informal opportunities for networking among those who attend. There were also examples of smaller organisations coming together, or being asked by freelancers to facilitate an event.

In some instances, organisations were recognised for focusing on support for particular areas of practice, which meant there was less overlap between organisations. For example, offering a commonly needed resource through digitally accessible means enhanced the recognition and value of the organisation and, as a result, others did not need to duplicate what they offered. However, some interviewees noted the challenge this created in other areas of practice that could not be so easily accessed via the internet.

Although there was a sense that the sector lacks some collective structure, many of the interviewees spoke about how the organisations they worked for engaged in forms of advocacy for the sector. They recognised their role in steering working conditions and championing the value of dance, but acknowledged not always feeling empowered or sufficiently guided to maintain this level of support. Where there were particular groups of organisations who were either geographically, operationally or artistically connected, it was recognised that increased communication and shared strategy could better support freelancers.



# 3.

## Economic Contributions of Freelancers

To date, there has been limited research assessing the economic contributions of freelancers in the dance sector. This creates challenges in accurately measuring their economic value and the impact they make on the UK economy. From an economic perspective, different methods to measure the economic functioning of a sector or industry do exist, however they are limited in representing the contributions of a dynamic workforce like freelance dance workers:

- **High level aggregation** involves combining data from economic variables and statistics reported by industrial organisations. Although this paints a broad picture of economic impact it tends to overgeneralise group activities, rather than taking into account the particularities of specific areas of practice
- **Income and expenditure** approaches calculate contribution based on the income, or sum, of artists' earnings if they were registered as self-employed, and their contributions through summing consumer, government and business investment spending and net exports. Both of these approaches could be biased in calculating the economic contributions because many freelancers do not earn over the income tax thresholds (above £11,850), and their impacts through community engagement via unpaid work or work that is not classified as dance (e.g. education, health, fitness) cannot be easily quantified
- **Input-output** models measure economic impact through the spending of arts and culture employees in the wider economy (for example, freelancers' spending on different products and services produced by other industries). This model does provide more comprehensive calculations for economic contributions but is challenging as it requires understanding the specific supply chain or the expenditure breakdowns of freelancers. For example, freelancers' artistic performances in festivals could increase the sales made by food stalls and other businesses. This approach would require developing a structural model depicting the relationship between various elements of freelance work in the dance sector, and the rest of the economy

To address the issues outlined with these various economic models, we conducted exploratory interviews with seven freelancers working in the dance sector to understand the economic activities and supply chains they engage with. This enabled us to: propose appropriate measures that could be used to calculate freelancers' economic contributions more accurately; understand the limitations of the common economic indicators used in measuring contributions and impacts; and develop a structural model of how freelancers in the dance sector relate to each other, within and beyond the dance sector.



### Economic Contributions

The findings of the interviews indicated many ways in which freelancers contributed to the UK economy directly and indirectly, which are summarised in figure 4.

Figure 4: Contributions of freelancers in the dance sector to the UK economy



### Knowledge-based economy through incorporating creativity in business activities and promoting artistic education

Knowledge-based economy is defined as an economy that is capable of knowledge production, dissemination and use, where knowledge is a key factor in growth, wealth creation and employment, and where human capital is the driver of creativity, innovation and generation of new ideas (Cavusoglu, 2016). As a nation progresses in economic development, there is a need for a creative workforce (Porter, 2011). The participants spoke about how their dance knowledge was used in a range of capacities in business and arts education, promoting creativity at various levels, educating people about health and wellbeing, and supporting local businesses through innovative approaches to advertising and marketing. The participants noted, however, that these activities were often taken for granted or not fully appreciated. Similarly, when they were asked to produce performances or activities to promote or highlight a product or service, freelancers felt that their specialist knowledge was not adequately valued. A choreographer and festival organiser said:

“ People with knowledge value it very much. But I still get people asking me to do things for free or, ‘Oh, could you just run this flash mob for us with, like, eight schools?’ ‘Yeah, I’d love to do that, done lots of things like that before. What’s the fee?’ ‘Oh, there’s no fee’.

In educational settings participants noted that although they were valued for their industry knowledge and connections, their pay only reflected the time they spent with a group of students. Important factors like administration and professional development that enabled them to undertake this kind of teaching were not often recognised or remunerated.

### Reducing public expenditure on healthcare and increasing labour productivity through promoting health and wellbeing and social inclusion through community engagement

According to the Charity Commission (2001), social exclusion is the phenomenon where people have no recognition, voice or stake in the society they live in. The causes of social exclusion are multiple and usually connected with factors affecting a person’s or community’s social or economic circumstances that prevent them from fully participating in society. Actions taken for social inclusion can have different economic impacts; for example, improving the health and wellbeing of senior citizens can potentially reduce the government’s healthcare costs.

Many of the interviewees spoke about how they supported the health and wellbeing of those who might otherwise be socially excluded. For example, one participant ran dance classes for senior citizens working with elderly and vulnerable individuals to increase mental health awareness, empathetic behaviour and social support. This activity was initially funded by the local council. However, she later continued to run these classes with limited financial support from the attendees. Another participant worked with local communities to create performances to promote disability awareness and shift the public’s perceptions about disabled individuals. Interviewees often identified themselves as ‘social workers’ rather than dance teachers as they saw themselves as providing support for people who did not have strong networks. Their participants often came from diverse ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds, or had experienced negative life experiences prior to joining dance classes. A teacher said:

“ You had some kids that had no support whatsoever, they were living in hostels and things like that, so then you kind of became their family...or you’d have young mums that haven’t worked because they didn’t finish their qualifications because they’ve had their children and things like that.

One participant spoke about teaching dance to young adults and school children, who became more confident and learned soft skills such as teamwork, building professional relationships and communicating effectively, which helped them transition into employment:

“

*One of our main projects was to all create work on community groups and to bring it together in a big theatre. So, I had a group of boys that weren't attending school...12 years later I was performing down the South Bank and I got a knock at the door... it was one of those boys who was training to be a lawyer and he said he never ever forgot that experience just because it was the first time he believed in himself and that someone said he could do it.*

”



### Developing regions as tourist destinations through promoting local cultural and historical heritage

Highlighting the cultural values and heritage of a region or a country has been identified by economists as promoting the tourism industry, thereby improving economic development as tourists bring money to the region, create business opportunities, employment and tax revenues (Du et al., 2016; Sinclair, 1998). However, the contributions of the creative industries and the work of specific artistic groups, such as dancers, have not explicitly been explored in relation to this area.

The interviews highlighted engagement in promoting local, regional and cultural heritage, cultural diversity and environmental awareness for children and adults alike. One interviewee recounted her work in organising performances related to war and soldiers, and another project which presented the true nature of and challenges faced by a working class industry, mining. Another participant talked about her experiences and knowledge in arts for environmental initiatives that brought communities, families and environment together:

“

*I was curator to create this art trail... we created this wildlife trail, because it's right next to a nature reserve... suddenly people are out exploring their own environment.*

”

Overall, there are numerous ways that freelancers in the dance sector contribute to the economy. Although they play active roles in different parts of society and their communities, many of the participants felt that there were no appropriate support mechanisms in place to recognise the work that went into these activities, or to help them negotiate their pay. Freelance dance workers' economic contributions cannot be measured in terms of the conventional economic indicators such as gross value of production, gross value added, fixed capital, business turnover, exchequer contributions of an industry, and employment, because their contributions are often intangible and have spill-over effects on other industries (see Figure 4, pg 20). In order to measure the economic contributions of freelancers, future studies should focus on a microeconomic industry-focused approach, examining the relationships, structures and supply chains that individuals connect with, both in and beyond dance.

# 4.

## Wellbeing and Resilience among Freelancers

There are numerous definitions and measurements of wellbeing but it is generally conceptualised as a global construct reflecting how individuals feel about their lives across a range of domains. It is important to consider the wellbeing of freelancers given the unpredictable and unstable nature of their work, which can cause anxiety, lowered self-confidence and motivation (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). On the other hand, freelance work may also enhance wellbeing due to the autonomy, flexibility and variety inherent in the career. In order to investigate wellbeing, we referred to Ryff's model (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1996, 1998), whereby wellbeing comprises the following domains: *autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance*. Qualitative research indicates that freelancers may experience many of these factors through their work in dance.

Aujla and Farrer (2015) reported that independent dancers valued the autonomy their work afforded them and felt they were making a contribution to dance or to their communities. They felt fulfilled by their work and the opportunities it gave them for personal and artistic growth. We were interested in expanding this existing research with a large sample of freelancers working in a range of roles, to quantitatively assess their wellbeing across these varied domains.

Interview studies of independent dancers also suggest they are optimistic and tenacious, able to persevere in order to meet their goals (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). These findings relate to a relatively new area in research termed grit, which Duckworth and her colleagues (2007) define as passion and persistence towards long-term goals. In achievement contexts, grit may be crucial to maintain commitment in the face of setbacks and failure as it represents sustained interest and effort over time towards goals that are personally meaningful and important. Research in various domains suggests

that high levels of grit are associated with sustained and effortful practice, improved performance, engagement, optimism, and life satisfaction (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2013; Stoffel & Cain, 2018). Each of these factors is presumably important for navigating and maintaining a freelance career; it was therefore of interest to measure levels of grit amongst the participants.

Of the total sample, 282 participants completed the 18-item Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and 276 completed the 8-item Short Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Statistical analyses revealed that in terms of the wellbeing domains, the participants scored highest for personal growth, followed by purpose in life, positive relations, self-acceptance, environmental mastery and finally autonomy (see Table 5). Personal growth scored particularly high, with an average score of 15.73 out of a maximum of 18.

**Table 5:** Wellbeing scores.

	Mean	Standard deviation
Autonomy	12.32	1.83
Environmental mastery	12.47	2.24
Self-acceptance	13.56	2.29
Personal growth	15.73	1.96
Positive relations	13.99	2.82
Purpose in life	14.11	2.52

Although causality cannot be assumed, it appears that working in the freelance dance sector may provide beneficial opportunities for personal growth, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, self-acceptance, and strong relationships with others. This supports previous reports that freelancers' work forms a strong part of their identity and the opportunities for creative and artistic freedom can help bolster their wellbeing (Aujla & Farrer, 2015).

When examining grit, on average the freelancers scored 3.90 ( $\pm .33$ ) out of a maximum of 5, which could be considered high as a score of 5 is 'extremely gritty' (Duckworth et al., 2007). This suggests that freelancers have relatively high levels of both passion and persistence for their long-term goals. Interestingly, grit scores decreased as career stage increased (with late career

**Table 6:** Grit scores according to career stage.

	Mean grit score	Standard deviation
Early career	3.86	.51
Mid-career	3.81	.23
Late career	3.66	.16

freelancers scoring the lowest), suggesting that the 'need' for grit may be greater in the early career stage as individuals attempt to find or create opportunities, build their reputation and establish themselves in both the field and in various support networks.

The high levels of grit reflect previous research highlighting the importance of optimism and self-belief which may help freelancers to negotiate the demands of the sector (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). The findings also suggest that those in their early careers developed grit in order to succeed. However, it may be the case that those low in grit did not persevere or succeed in the freelance sector, indicating that provision of systematic mental skills training, coping skills, mentoring, social connections and fostering peer support may be crucial both in training and beyond.



# 5.

## Celebrating the Sector

The aim of this research was to better understand the working lives of freelancers in dance, their support needs, wellbeing, and the important contributions they make to the sector and their wider communities. A range of freelance roles were represented in this study, including teachers, performers, directors, healthcare providers, producers, choreographers and managers. Most participants considered education, performing or choreography to be their main job, although their work spanned various roles and contexts, due to both their willingness and need to take on different roles to enhance experience and income. Our tracking surveys demonstrated fluctuations in both hours worked and pay received from various settings, highlighting the frequently changing nature of this work. Written contracts were more common than verbal contracts for the roles represented in the research, but less formal types of contract were still commonly reported, particularly for early career freelancers. Word of mouth and networking remained a critical means of finding work.

- Freelancers are a **highly educated** and **skilled** workforce (over 40% are educated to postgraduate level) and **many hold additional qualifications** such as those related to health or inclusion, evidencing ways that they engage with particular communities
- Freelancers **contribute to communities and society in multiple ways**, including:
  - » addressing social issues
  - » changing attitudes and perceptions
  - » building audiences and participants both locally and internationally
  - » supporting other freelancers through mentoring and facilitation
- Freelancers **benefit the economy** through:
  - » incorporating creativity in business activities and promoting artistic education which creates and contributes to the knowledge-based economy
  - » promotion of health and wellbeing which both improves labour productivity and reduces costs to the NHS
  - » promotion of local environmental, historical and cultural heritage to increase national income through tourism
- Freelancers have **high levels of wellbeing**, particularly in terms of personal growth and purpose in life. Working freelance may enable individuals to live in accordance with their values and goals, supporting their wellbeing
- Freelancers report **high levels of grit**, indicating they have both passion for and persistence towards long-term goals

## Challenges and Recommendations

Despite these positive findings, there are a number of areas which represent future challenges to be addressed to further support the sector.

### Articulating worth and value to those within and outside of the dance sector

Freelancers contribute to their communities, society and the wider sector but find articulating the value of their work challenging with their contributions undermined by negative external perceptions about dance as an art form and sector hierarchies that undervalue certain roles. Freelancers have multiple impacts on a range of sectors such as helping develop local arts, audiences, professional development and providing health benefits.

*Greater recognition by employers and collaborators should help empower freelancers to articulate their value and the various contributions their work makes to better negotiate rates of pay, contracts and benefits.*

### Not all roles are visible and valued equally

Freelancers feel the UK Dance sector has traditionally placed more value on performing and choreography roles and that impacts the visibility of their work, measures of success, equal treatment and personal worth.

*Dance organisations, including networking bodies and support organisations, should consult freelancers on a strategy to empower freelancers in profiling their skills and experience across all areas of practice to develop future opportunities.*

### Access to support networks

Freelancers and support organisations require an effective method of communication regarding available support and opportunities. They desire more affordable professional development such as regular courses and training in specific areas of practise, networking and relationship-building opportunities, health and wellbeing and family support.

*Dance support organisations and networks of dance organisations should work with HE and other arts organisations and public bodies to facilitate face-to-face and online networking that builds skills,*

*relationships and equality of access to ensure networks are open to all practitioners. They should develop programmes with 'Parents And Carers In The Performing Arts' (PiPA.) to facilitate access for those with caring responsibilities too.*

### Understanding of contractual and other benefit rights

Participants reported that benefits vary across roles and fewer than 10% of roles provided benefits as part of contract terms. Fees were too low, did not account for preparation and travel time and often did not increase with experience level.

*Dance support organisations should work with Equity and organisations that engage freelancers to agree and publish a freely accessible Code of Conduct outlining what parties can expect from contracts. Deviations from the Code should be clearly explained by organisations with a reporting body to advise both parties.*

### Negotiating rates of pay

The average annual income from freelance work reported by participants is well below the national average. Freelancers desire higher rates of pay and better benefits commensurate with their skills, experience and qualifications but at times find it difficult to negotiate due to limited finance and administration training and other forms of business development.

*Dance support organisations should work with FE, HE and other arts organisations to develop regular training modules on business and administration with online access. Dance support organisations should also work with Equity, UK Theatre and ITC to provide a single-source and free handbook, in print and online, on contractual rights, pay guidelines and working conditions.*

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# The Role and Impact of Freelancers in the UK Dance Sector

## Brief report

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