

## YDance – Scottish Youth Dance

### Submission to Cultural Commission

#### Background Information

A joint submission to the commission is being made on behalf of a group of key dance organisations addressing the issues which are relevant to the sector as a whole. YDance, as the National Dance Agency for children and young people in Scotland, has contributed to this submission, and now wishes to add expanded comments on areas which are particularly relevant to the work we do.

YDance works in primary and secondary schools and in after school and voluntary sector organisations, to promote dance both as a means of increasing physical activity and of developing confidence and social skills amongst Scotland's children and young people. Our work covers the entire age range of school pupils, with specialist programmes for different ages.

YDance works in partnership with a range of agencies including the Scottish Arts Council, sportscotland, Local Authorities and the Scottish Executive Health Improvement Strategy Division, addressing a range of objectives – creativity, artistic development, increasing physical activity, improving health, personal and social development.

YDance is also engaged in widening the skills base, enabling Primary teachers and PE specialist teachers to deliver dance themselves. The company runs In-Service Training, based on a series of interactive CD-ROMs, designed to give teachers ideas and advice, and to assist them in developing their own lessons.

**AnyBodyCanDance** (ABCD) incorporates animated warm-up exercises, video, advice bank, games and workshop ideas, a choreography tool, music maker and lesson planner. It is designed to be updated regularly by downloading free packages from our website, which add new games, sounds, dance moves and games to the resource, thus avoiding it becoming obsolete.

**321 Go!** provides similar support for teachers working with Primary 1 - 3 pupils. The exercises and dance ideas in the resource are suitable for ages 4 - 7 , and the animation and music maker features GORF the dancing frog, to appeal more to children of this age. The **321 Go!** CD-ROM has recently been shortlisted for the prestigious **BAFTA Interactive Award** in the Children's Learning category.

A third CD-ROM, **Science~Physical**, is aimed at upper primary pupils and focuses on the use of dance to enhance teaching of science topics.

## **Response to the Interim Report / Pan Sectoral Questions**

### Education / Rights and Entitlements

If the idea of a right or entitlement to culture is to be in any way meaningfully fulfilled, it requires that citizens are aware of cultural opportunities open to them and can make informed judgements about the culture they choose to experience. For that to happen, we must instil in children at an early age an acceptance of all forms of culture as a natural part of their lives. We must therefore accord cultural activities a much higher status within the educational curriculum than they have at present, and ensure that they are no longer sidelined. As well as increasing the status of marginalised cultural subjects such as dance and drama (in comparison to visual art and music), schools should recognise the capacity of dance and drama to be used as teaching methods, enabling children who do not learn well through traditional reading and listening to achieve their potential through more physical and creative learning styles.

As the principal provider of participatory dance in Scotland's schools, YDance is in a position to have an overview of current provision in the field of dance. Whilst there is a requirement for primary schools to include dance in their curriculum, it is often fulfilled by a few sessions of Scottish Country Dancing in the year, and children are seldom offered the opportunity to participate in other dance styles, or to see dance performances unless one of the professional dance companies is in their area. In secondary schools, dance is not classed as a subject in its own right, but included in the PE curriculum, and most PE teachers lack the expertise to teach a range of styles and have few resources to call on to improve their own skills or bring in outside experts. This is reflected in the paucity of numbers of schools offering dance as an exam subject.

There is a great need for dance to be recognised as a subject in the curriculum in its own right, and accorded equal status with Art and Music in schools (Drama is further down this road than Dance but is still at a lower level than the traditional cultural subjects in schools). This recognition would allow the development of a career path in Scotland for a greater number of young people who wish to be professional dancers, and stimulate the establishment of more degree-level courses for dancers within Scotland. It would also prevent the loss of the creative and artistic aspect of dance, and avoid the situation where dance is only seen as a means of encouraging physical activity and not as an art form.

There is scope to increase dance participation by increasing the status of dance within teacher training – whether for primary teachers or PE teachers. Again YDance has made small inroads in this area offering training to teacher training colleges, but there is a lack of impetus in the colleges to increase dance training given the low status of the subject in the school curriculum.

YDance is also concerned about the lack of opportunity for children and young people to experience dance as audiences. Future habits in use of leisure time are founded in experiences at school age, and the number of children who experience dance performances in Scotland on a regular basis (or at all) is small. YDance has recently attempted to obtain funding for a schools tour, as the first stage in developing a full-time professional performance wing of the company, dedicated to producing dance productions for schools and children and young people in public venues. The proposal was not supported by the SAC Lottery Fund, nor can the core funding received by YDance in any way contribute to such a development. There appears to be no route by which such a development can take place in Scotland at present, given the current level of funding and lack of strategic thinking in dance in education at a national level.

### Developing Talent

Scotland needs to offer young dancers greater opportunities to train and to pursue professional careers, whether as performers or teachers, within the country,. In order to provide such opportunity, not only will we have to raise the status of dance in schools to a stand-alone subject and provide higher level dance courses at colleges and universities, but also to provide ongoing training for professional dancers and dance workers. YDance has found that it is very difficult to recruit dance workers with the level of expertise and experience we require for tutors working in schools, and had had to institute in-house training courses and recruit tutors from colleges and universities outside Scotland to fill this gap.

### National Companies

National companies can be defined as those who fulfil a specific, clearly identified role in delivering a particular artform to audiences and / or participants throughout Scotland. They may vary in size, but the scope of their operation should be such that the opportunities for participation they offer are available nationally.

National companies should be leaders in their fields, providing work of a standard to which other companies can aspire, encouraging the development of their artform through training of emerging artists or teachers, and being ambassadors, taking works and examples of excellence in Scottish culture all over the world.

National companies would benefit from a long term strategic planning and funding structure, and from working with a national arts development body which pulls together aspirations and plans from Local Authorities or regional arts bodies, and from other policy areas within the Executive which "cross-cut" with culture in order to identify the areas of demand which can be fulfilled by the national companies and which by companies at a regional level.

Such a structure would serve to enable and encourage partnership working with other national agencies, local authorities and other regional organisations to allow the arts to be experienced by people in Scotland no matter their geographical location or financial status.

### Funding Structures

The interim report comments on the current funding system being too complex and piecemeal. That is certainly the experience of YDance, and we would further comment that in our case it has demonstrated a distinct lack of long-term strategic thinking. It is difficult to understand how the funding levels of national companies and other core funded organisations are set by the Scottish Arts Council. YDance, as a core funded national company, receives £65,000 in annual core grant, which funds none of our work at all, only covering around 33% of our core staff costs and overheads. In order to access this funding, the company is expected to provide an annual programme of work including 400 workshops, 30 teacher training days, development of new CD-ROM resources and training packages and undertake 5 major projects in a year, none of which is directly funded by the core SAC grant. YDance must obtain at least 75% of it's funding from other sources, and the company does so from partnerships with Local Authorities and other agencies, all of which are dependent on short-term funding initiatives, and from sales of CD-ROMs, workshops and In-Service Training.

In 2002 YDance was awarded Advancement Funding from the SAC Lottery Fund, to enable the company to develop into the National Dance Agency for children and young people in Scotland,

providing participatory work, teacher training and dance resources including the CD-ROMs. Despite enormous success in this field over the past three years, as our Advancement Programme ends we have little opportunity to continue our development, as there is no recognition of the increased scope and scale of our work in any increase in core funding.

This experience reflects the need for national companies to be able to engage in a planning process with a central cultural body, a dialogue in which the company is recognised as the expert voice in a particular field, and as an agency which can provide work on a truly national basis throughout Scotland. YDance has benefited from such a dialogue with the Health Improvement Strategy Division of the Scottish Executive over the past two years, and is about to embark on a programme of work which will take dance into schools in every local authority area in Scotland, albeit once again under the banner of increasing physical activity and promoting healthy lifestyles rather than as a creative pursuit.

This programme, however, is again time-limited and only covers one aspect of the company's work. In order to develop new areas, including performance for children, the company, like other core funded organisations, would benefit from a realistic level of core funding, which enables us to pay core staff and overheads, extends to the cost of an agreed programme of work and allows room for fundraising for new developments from other sources.

#### International

If Scotland is to be perceived as having a vibrant cultural life, the profile of Scottish arts overseas must be increased, as must the opportunities for international artists and companies to perform in Scotland. It is unfortunate that at the time devolution was implemented in Scotland no thought was given to the establishment of a Scottish agency to carry out the kind of work undertaken by the British Council, promoting the work of our artists abroad and enabling overseas artists to perform and exhibit here. Such an agency could be created, possibly combined with a national planning / funding body or as a separate entity.

#### **Conclusion**

As a national company which has established excellent partnerships with Local Authorities, diverse sport and health agencies and arts agencies over the past three years, YDance welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the national debate on culture in Scotland. We would urge the Cultural Commission to consider as crucial to the establishment of culture as an integral part of people's lives in Scotland, the promotion of the status of arts activity in schools, the raising of the profile of culture by the establishment of a separate Culture Ministry within the Scottish Executive, the promotion of collaborative working to fulfil the remits of other government departments and local authority departments, and funding of artists and companies at a realistic level and over longer time periods, to allow them to focus on their cultural remits as agreed with local or national planning and funding bodies.

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