

# Dance Ireland Research Project

## Online Survey Results

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### Overview

Over the past eight years, Dance Ireland has conducted three Dance Count surveys with its membership, beginning in 2008, with a follow up survey in 2010 and a final survey in 2012. The objective of these surveys was to build an accurate database of statistical information on the events, activities and funding of the sector. The surveys also compiled details of audience attendance and participation in dance activities as well as tracking trends in employment and the average spend on dance by both members and audiences.

Clear evidence emerged from the Dance Count surveys that organisational dance spend between 2008 and 2012 had fallen dramatically from over €7m to just over €3.5m (Nugent, Dance Counts 2012, 2013). The number of people employed by organisations in the dance sector fell significantly to 490 in 2012, a drop of 74% from 2010 with 4% of jobs full-time, compared to 9% in 2008 (Nugent, Dance Counts 2012, 2013). The impact of these downward trends are still being felt by Dance Ireland members today.

The purposes of the online survey undertaken as part of this research was to focus on the membership of Dance Ireland and to ascertain their views on the services, supports and resources provided by the organisation. The survey also provided an opportunity for members to share their views on the challenges facing them and the sector over the next three to five years.

It was clear from the content and tone of the responses that both companies and individuals are feeling a sense of weariness with the struggle to find the resources to continue making work in the face of reduced funding support. There is a strong sense of insecurity across the sector with the move to project funding and the consequent lack of continuity and growth with the pressure to constantly create new work. With a lack of experienced dance producers in the sector, it is difficult to find the time and energy to develop new partnerships, build regular touring networks and nurture new collaborations to create work. However, notwithstanding the above, there is a strong appetite from members to increase their training and professional development, to create, commission and present more work and to commit fully to a career in dance and in the dance sector.

Although the survey was longer than an average user survey, it was deliberately detailed so as to gather as much meaningful information as possible. Given the range of services and supports offered by Dance Ireland, and the need for the questionnaire to give members an opportunity to share their ideas and concerns, the survey required both qualitative and quantitative questions, if it was to be genuinely useful.

For the purposes of the survey, the current membership was defined as those who had renewed their membership up to and including 2017 and also those 2016 members whose membership was due for renewal.

150 current members (2017) received the survey, 64% of recipients opened the survey, which is considerably higher than the benchmark average of between 15 and 20%. There was a similarly high response amongst the 2016 members, with an open rate of 42% amongst the 31 members who received the survey. Taking into account only those members who opened the survey, 53% of the 2017 members and 54% of 2016 members fully completed the survey.

A slightly reworded version of the survey, taking into account that their membership was historical rather than current, was sent to 202 lapsed members from the period 2012 to 2015. Understandably, given the lapse in time, the open rate was much lower at 31%. However, of those who opened the survey, the completion rate was high at 68%. Given the average response rate to online surveys is closer to 24% (Fluid Surveys , 2014) this is a good overall result.

Established by a group of committed and passionate dance artists, Dance Ireland is first and foremost a membership organisation so it is appropriate that the members would be the primary source for the survey. It is clear from the response rate that members, both past and present, appreciated not just the opportunity to contribute their thoughts on the practical services and supports offered by Dance Ireland but also the spirit of openness which the extensive circulation and follow up of the survey demonstrated.

There is a strong sense coming through the survey that the membership feels a growing sense of empowerment when they are given the opportunity to be included and involved in decision making, particularly at this moment in time when the organisation is reflecting on how it can best serve the future needs of the dance sector in Ireland.

There is a high degree of synchronicity in the responses of the current and lapsed members, with similar preferences expressed around the high value placed on various services and initiatives. It is also clear that the issues which challenge the current membership, particularly around the shifts in strategic policy and funding of arts agencies and the need for the organisation to create impact and support the needs of members within and outside Dublin, are key concerns for both groups.

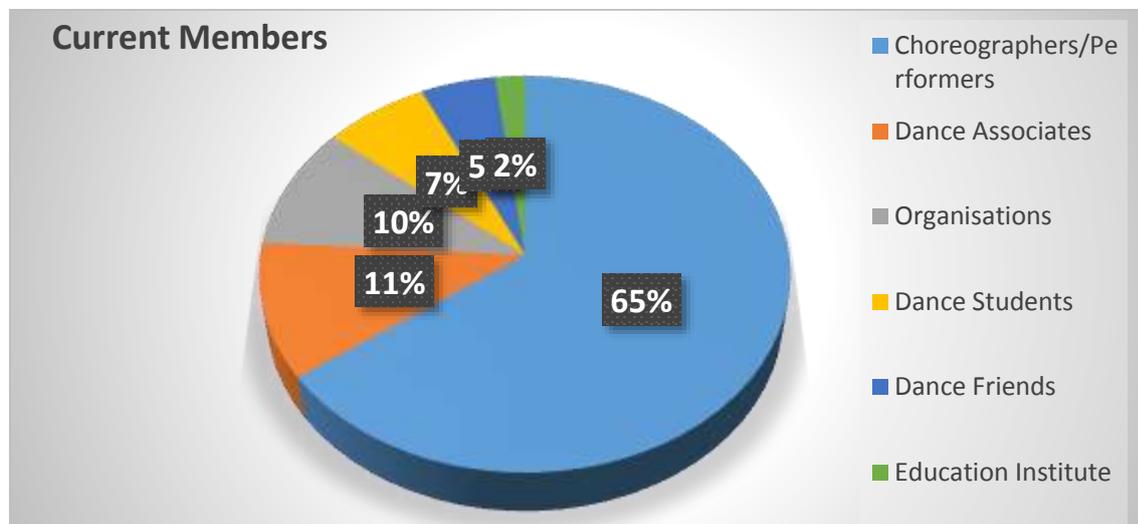
Overall, there is a high degree of satisfaction with the services and supports on offer from Dance Ireland with, if anything, recurring requests for more classes and increased diversity in the range of classes i.e. aerial dance, 5 Rhythms Mindful Movement Practice. This satisfaction is also reflected in the responses of the lapsed members, many of whom indicated that they had intended to renew their membership or that the lapse had been unintentional. Increased availability of studio space, a higher degree of flexibility in using the facilities and a reduction in rates and fees to reward loyalty were also recurring issues for members.

## Membership

By far the largest response to the survey came from Choreographers/Performers with 65% of participants selecting this option, and 51% of lapsed members also selecting this category. 11% of respondents were Dance Associates, which includes dance educators, administrators, producers, writers, curators etc. A higher proportion of the lapsed members (22%) selected this option and it is likely that, although their direct involvement in dance might change, lapsed members are likely to retain their interest in the dance sector. 10% of current respondents are from Organisations, with 8% of lapsed members selecting this category.

Of the smaller categories, 7% identified as Dance Students, which includes members currently in training, third level dance or choreography course students, those studying in independent dance schools or with private teachers, members of youth dance ensembles or youth dance companies. There was a higher response rate of 14% in this category from amongst the lapsed membership. Although only speculation, this might reflect the challenge to pay fees or could possibly signify that they have completed training and their membership may have moved to another category.

5% of those who completed the survey are Dance Friends i.e. those who have an interest in dance and wish to join the growing lobby for support of dance in Ireland, with the same percentage of lapsed members (5%) also selecting this category. 2% of current members selected Education Institute as their membership category and none of the lapsed members who completed the survey selected this option.



Over half of the current members (51%) have been with Dance Ireland for less than 5 years, 18% of whom joined within the last year. Similarly, the largest percentage of lapsed members (76%) joined for between one and five years and of this group, 27% joined for one year.

24% of current members and 21% of lapsed members joined Dance Ireland for between 6 and 10 years. 25% of the current members have retained their membership for over 11 years with only 3% of lapsed members selecting this category.

When asked to share the reason why they didn't renew their membership, there were a number of recurring responses to this question including:

- Changing financial circumstances which meant that they couldn't afford the membership or they prioritised other necessities
- A change of location which meant that members had either left Dublin or Ireland and couldn't/wouldn't be in a position to avail of Dance Ireland resources
- Members have moved out of the sector or out of the arts and, for some, their circumstances had changed (started a family, taking a career break)
- A significant number of members expressed their intention to renew their membership and the lapse was unintentional. Dance Ireland noted a spike in renewals of membership following the online survey.

There was a sense from those members who are based outside Dublin that they were not benefitting from the resources at DanceHouse and therefore felt it was not worth their while to re-join.

5.6% of those who responded to this question decided to discontinue their membership because they didn't feel valued by the organisation or they felt it didn't have anything to offer their particular practice.

## Resources

The survey offered nine options to members who were asked to rate them from *most beneficial* to *least beneficial*. All of the options were rated highly with only marginal differences between each option.

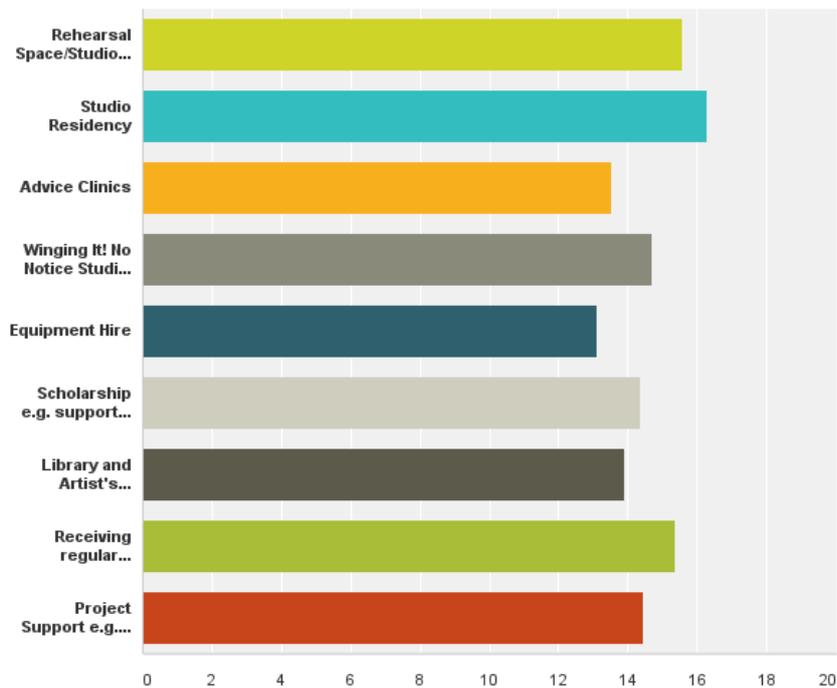
The options which focused on the provision of studio residencies, studio space and *Winging it!* (no-notice studio hire facility) as well as receiving regular information on news and opportunities were of most value to members. As choreographers and performers comprised the majority of those who completed the survey, it is understandable that the resource support provided by Dance Ireland for artists to create work is of primary importance to this group.

Project support such as financial management advice, cash flow and off-site insurance as well as professional development support (attendance at events, scholarships etc.) were rated next in order of their benefit to members, with the library and artist's resource room and advice clinics following closely. The facility to hire equipment was of less benefit to this group than the other more direct support services.

However, it was clear from the responses that all of the current resources offered by Dance Ireland were valued by members with none of the services or resources scoring below the average response rate.

**Q3 Which of these resources do you find most beneficial? [Please rate in order of preference with 1 being most beneficial]**

Answered: 56 Skipped: 53



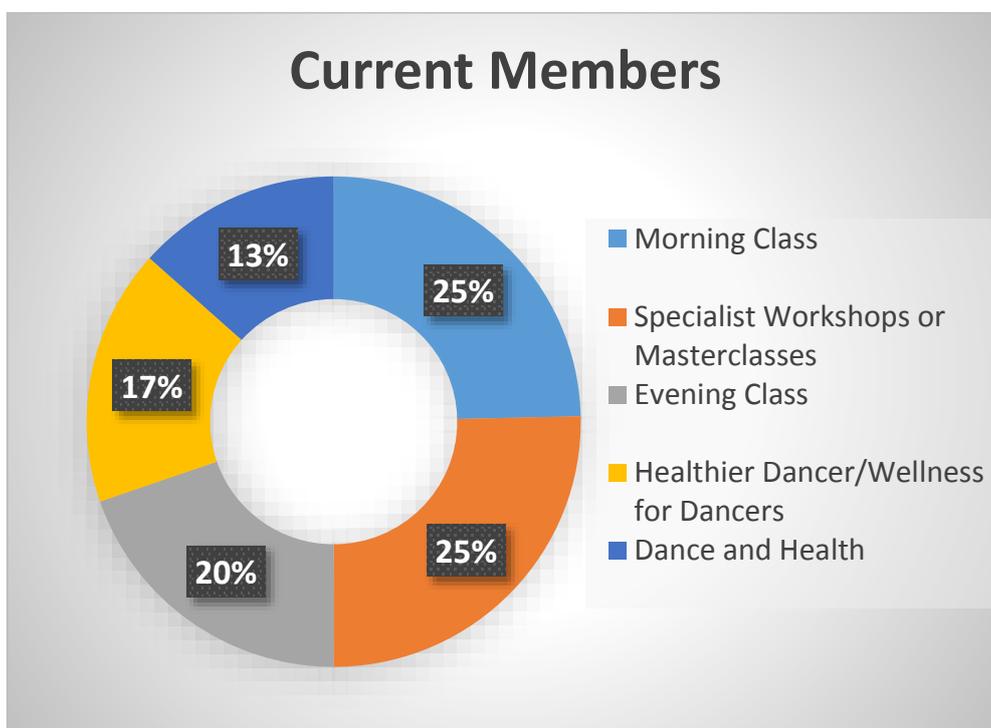
A similar response was given by lapsed members who rated all of the services between 4 and 7 out of 10, with the lowest rating (4) given to Project Support. As this is a very particular resource support, required by members who are presenting or producing work, it is not surprising that this would be less useful than more day to day services such as the provision of rehearsal and studio space.

The most useful resources for lapsed members mirrored those of current members and included the provision of rehearsal and studio space, *Winging It!* studio residencies and receiving regular e-bulletins and information notices. Marginally behind these services (rated 6 and of equal benefit) included access to advice clinics, equipment hire, the resource and library room, scholarships and support to attend events.

## Training

Again, perhaps a reflection of the majority of constituents who completed the survey, the provision of morning class (ballet and contemporary) was rated highly by the membership, with 35% selecting them as either their first or second preference.

Specialist workshops/masterclasses were also rated highly [36% rated them as their second choice] with evening dance class and Healthier Dancer/Wellness for Dancers initiatives selected as third and fourth priorities [28% and 24% respectively]. Dance and Health was rated less useful than the other choices but this might also reflect the specialist nature of the initiative.

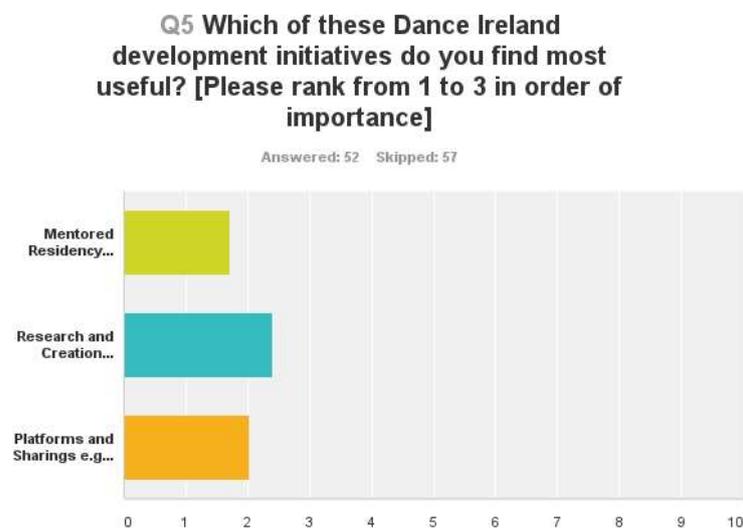


A similar trend emerged in the lapsed membership survey with a marginally higher rating given to the provision of specialist masterclasses and workshops, closely followed by daily class (equal rating for ballet, contemporary and evening class) and also the Healthier Dancer/Wellness for Dancers initiatives. The lowest rating, but again only by a marginal degree, was given to the Dance and Health initiative.

## Development Initiatives

Given the range of resource supports offered by Dance Ireland, a separate question about professional development support was included to distinguish this aspect from the more practical training supports.

Of the three options included, the provision of *Research and Creation* opportunities (e.g. the Dance Ireland Residency, the Dance Ireland Tyrone Guthrie Residency, Associate Artist, Hatch etc.) is considered most useful [53% rated it 1] closely followed by *Platforms and Sharings* (e.g. Friday New Works, First Looks, New Movements, Dance Talks) which rated highly as a first and second choice [36% and 30% respectively]. The *Mentored Residency Support Award/Next Stage/Dance Dramaturgy* initiatives were considered least useful in the context of this list with 48% selecting it as their third preference.



Amongst the lapsed members, *Platforms and Sharings* were rated most important of the three options (35% of respondents selected as their first choice) with the provision of *Research and Creation* opportunities selected as the second most useful development initiative. *Mentored Residencies* and other supported initiatives (Next Stage, Dance Dramaturgy) were ranked third but only by a marginal percentage.

Again, these results are likely to reflect the majority constituency who completed the survey who are primarily creators of work (choreographers, performers) and the results reflect the value placed on the provision of space and time for them to develop and share their practice.

## Dance Ireland Projects and Initiatives

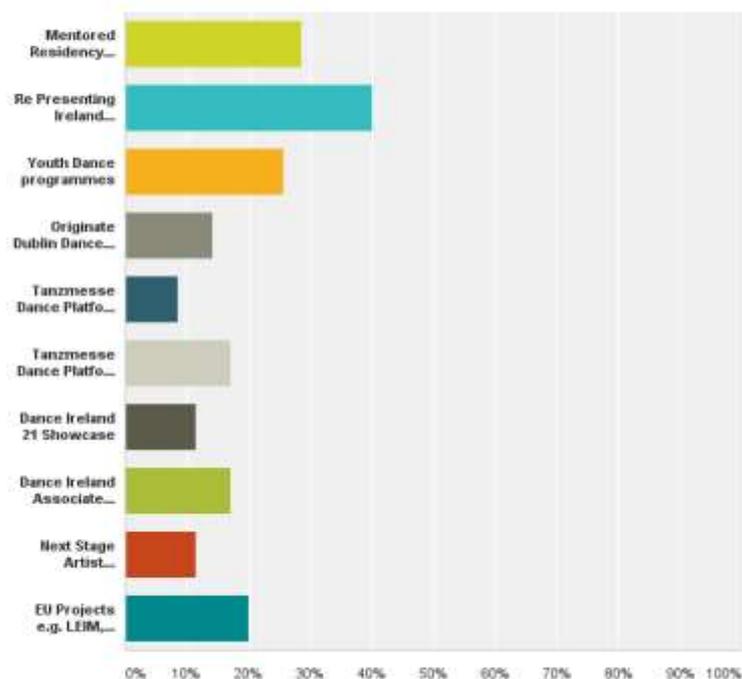
Re Presenting Ireland, a showcase initiative by Culture Ireland, Dance Ireland and the Dublin Dance Festival (2008 to 2015) scored highest in the list of opportunities and initiatives, with 40% of those who completed the survey indicating they had participated in this programme. This is also likely to reflect the perspective of the survey participants and the fact that 49% have been members of Dance Ireland for at least six years, which would mirror the timeframe of this particular initiative.

There was an equally close response from members who participated in the Mentored Residency [28%], the Youth Dance programmes [25%] and in the Dance Ireland EU initiatives including LEIM, Communicating Dance and Modul Dance [20%]. 17% of survey participants travelled as delegates to the Tanzmesse dance platform with a similar figure of 17% involved in the Dance Ireland Associate Artist Scheme.

There was a lower participation rate of 14 % for the Originate Dublin Dance Festival showcase, with participation by 11% of the membership in the Next Stage artist development initiative and Made in Ireland, a showcase programme as part of Dance Ireland 21. Performance participation in the Tanzmesse NRW dance platform scored lowest at 8% but this is likely to be an indication of the competitiveness of the selection process and the small number of Irish artists and companies who have applied and have been successful. The event is also bi-annual which limits the number of opportunities for artists to participate in the platform.

### Q6 Which of these Dance Ireland projects or initiatives have you or your company participated in?

Answered: 35 Skipped: 74



The First Looks showcase, part of the new Originate showcase of Irish work in the Dublin Dance Festival and the Dance Ireland 21 showcases are relatively recent initiatives which might also explain the lower participation rating for both.

Re Presenting Ireland was also the highest ranking initiative in this category amongst lapsed members with 43% participation, closely followed by the Youth Dance programmes with 38% participation. There was a large gap between these and the next selection option of EU Projects (19%), the Dance Ireland 21 showcase and the Mentored Residency (both selected by 14%). Originate, the Dance Ireland Associate Artist initiative and delegate attendance at Tanzmesse were at the lower end of the selection, ranging between 9% and 4% respectively. The Tanzmesse performance showcase and Next Stage were not selected by any participants.

### Additional Supports or Resources

There are a number of recurring themes and issues which emerge in the open response to this question which reflect both the culture of change which is taking place across the arts in general and within the dance sector in particular. The majority of the responses take the form of practical items or suggestions to support the creation of new work or help create further opportunities for dance artists. Samples of these suggestions include:

- An experienced dance producer who would be based in DanceHouse and who could work with 3 or 4 mid-career artists and nurture new producers to help with artist career management and create commercial dance opportunities
- An international dance notice board to promote opportunities within Europe and with the network of European Dance Houses
- A more welcoming less formal meeting/networking space and drop in cafe which would help build a sense of inclusiveness and community amongst the sector and with artists from other art form sectors
- Additional classes (particularly in ballet and including aerial work), increase the number and range of classes with specialist international teachers, the inclusion of somatic movement classes (e.g. yoga, Feldenkrais and Alexander techniques)
- Increase access to resources, talks and seminars for members outside Dublin through the Dance Ireland website (e.g. webinars, online courses etc.)
- Increased subsidy and lower fees for studio rental and *Winging It!*

The issue of access to Dance Ireland resources which are building-based for those outside Dublin was raised on a number of occasions. This is partly due to the nature of the resources i.e. studio spaces, but it is also a perception of the organisation generally. Where possible, this is something that might be addressed through increased use of the website and live streaming of events, podcasts, webinars etc.

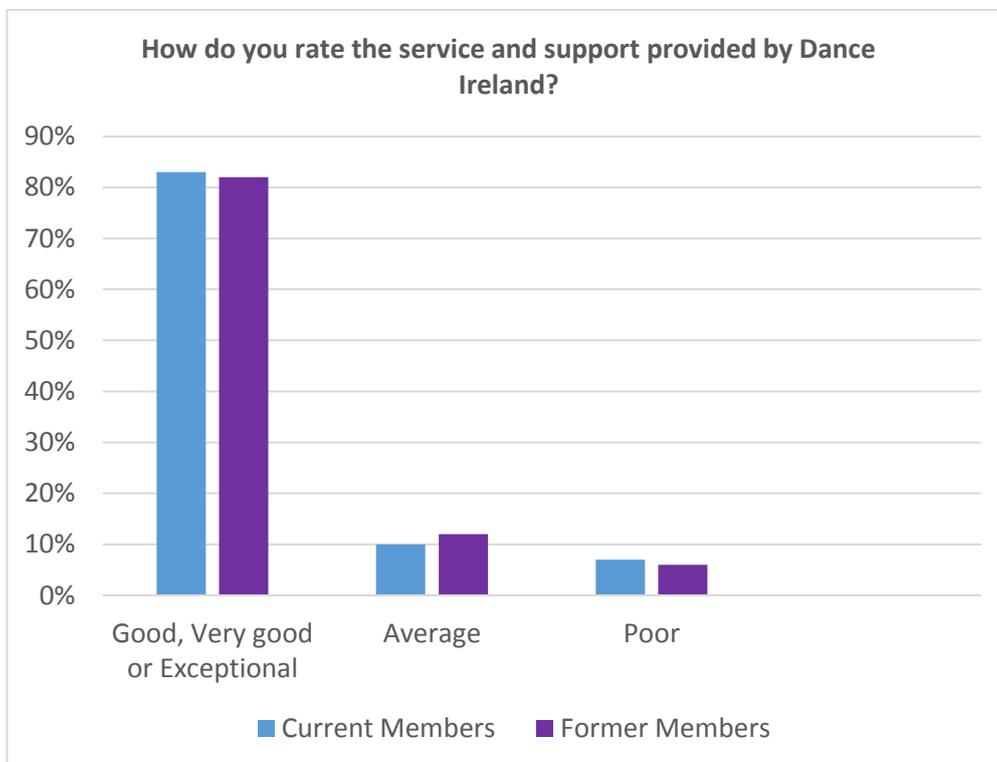
Taking into account those members who may have childcare issues, the possibility of making one class a week child friendly or rotating class to facilitate those with young families was also mentioned.

Amongst the lapsed members, similar suggestions arose around the provision of additional classes, the challenge of accessing resources and support for those members outside Dublin. These included the possible expansion of the mentorship initiative to include creative artists from outside the dance community, parent and children friendly activities which reflect the changing circumstances of the membership and creating a positive and easy atmosphere for informal networking and conversations within DanceHouse.

In addition to the above, there was also a suggestion around how Dance Ireland might assist the sector in gaining access to practical information regarding rights, pension and unemployment entitlements, tax advice etc. The possibility of the community forming a union which might help with advocacy as well as building a sense of strength for the sector was also suggested.

### Satisfaction Ratings

83% of those members who completed the survey rated the service offered by Dance Ireland as *Good, Very Good or Exceptional*. This is an extremely high satisfaction rate and would indicate a very positive appreciation by the membership of the current service support provided by Dance Ireland.



When asked to expand on the reasons for their rating, the range of responses included:

- *If I have any queries, they are answered speedily. If I need any further information I feel it is easy to ask for it and I get a good response*
- *They were able to help with studio space in residency quickly*
- *The executive work really hard to ensure members are now at the centre of everything they do*
- *Friendly, helpful and open to new initiatives*
- *Rehearsal facilities of a high quality. Staff friendly, helpful and welcoming*
- *Increasing breadth of involvement in different aspects of dance*
- *I feel Dance Ireland have definitely started to up their game recently. I feel now, there is more dialogue between the organisation and its members, more things 'happening'. It's becoming more alive and DI have started to listen, although I do still feel more action needs to follow this listening.*

10% considered the service to be average and 7% felt it was poor. Some of the particular concerns and reasons for the low rating is evident in the responses:

- *I think it is great for beginning career artists but much less relevant for mid-or developed career artists ... how to bridge the gap?*
- *Dance Ireland could not only show pro efficiency of its own goals but open its attention to the sectors needs and voices*
- *Building would benefit from a social/networking space*
- *I feel it is the organisation's responsibility to create a warm and creative atmosphere within the building and I think they are failing at this*
- *A lot of what's on offer I can't access for a variety of reasons – being based 4 hours from Dublin in a rural location would be a main one*
- *Could have a stronger leadership role within the sector in terms of support*
- *Very much dance artist living near or in Dublin-based. Not very dance teacher friendly, though an improvement has been noted, most notably dance talks and workshops running during school breaks.*

There is a strong sense that Dance Ireland is working hard to help, advise and support the membership. However, the opportunities and resources which come about as a result of managing the DanceHouse building can also challenge the organisation in terms of capacity and restrict its engagement with the community, particularly outside Dublin. But overall the feedback is that the quality of the facilities and the positive supportive attitude of the staff, from reception through to the Board and Executive, is key to what makes Dance Ireland a valuable resource for the membership and the dance sector.

Amongst the lapsed members, 81% rated the service of Dance Ireland as *Good, Very Good* or *Exceptional*, over half of which (42%) rating it *Very Good* or *Exceptional*. 12% of respondents rated the service *Average* with 7% rating it *Poor*.

Just over a third of the group chose to expand on the reasons for giving their rating. Several members referred to a lack of relevance for them as they live outside Dublin as a reason for giving a lower rating. One member mentioned the location of DanceHouse and the challenging social issues in the area as being a negative factor for them.

Extending access to specialist workshops and masterclasses to non-professional dancers was mentioned on a number of occasions. The role of Dance Ireland as a vital advocate for the sector was also mentioned, with the absence of representation of a dance specialist on The Arts Council cited as an example of a lack of visibility and influence for dance at a strategic level. There was strong recognition from the membership of the professionalism and quality of service provided by the Dance Ireland team but also a sense that the building can be a little cold and impersonal and that sometimes this can amplify a sense of disconnection between the community and the organisation. A sample of the responses include:

- *I have found some of the members of staff to be extremely helpful and generous with their time and others to be quite impersonal, which is a shame after years of custom. The facility's [sic] are incredible, but in the height of summer it's extremely difficult to control the temperature of the rooms, so I think air conditioning needs to be seriously considered-from a health and safety point of view.*
- *I felt the service was good, but there were issues regarding atmosphere, and some tensions around the building and with the staff that made it difficult to communicate at times.*
- *I have felt welcomed and comfortable during my time spent at DanceHouse when in the process of devising and rehearsing. I check the Dance Ireland website frequently to keep in touch with what's on.*
- *I didn't feel a part of the organisation. The relationship to dancers in the building is a problem. There is an unwelcoming atmosphere and this needs to be addressed before I would renew my membership.*
- *Overall I've always found DI staff to be really helpful and willing to find good supportive solutions. At times though there were occasions when there was what seemed like unnecessary inflexibility -- I completely understand the need for process & procedure to keep a building/organisation like that working... but there were just a few occasions when a little extra flexibility would have been really nice!*
- *In terms of direct cost versus product/service received, DI membership was not of massive relative benefit to me. When in residence I found staff distant.*

- *I can't help but compare DI to other dance agencies I interact with and it's not a favourable comparison in terms of cost, access, support, openness and integration with the local dance community.*
- *The space is always kept beautifully as if the space itself is important to inspiring creativity. The staff have [sic] always been without exception very helpful and courteous. During the day it is a very peaceful place to work with no noise issues.*
- *The staff knows [sic] their business and the way the house works is very clear. The studio residency is a great thing to have*

An additional question was added to the lapsed members survey on what they valued most about their membership of Dance Ireland. Over half of the respondents chose to complete this question. The responses centred around two particular aspects - the opportunity to avail of the high quality facilities at DanceHouse and an appreciation of feeling part of a community and a sense of connection to the wider dance family. Several responses referenced their awareness of Dance Ireland becoming more open to dialogue and engagement with the membership. There is a growing recognition that changes are taking place, not just in terms of the practical requirements of the sector (studio space, residencies, discounted classes and studio hire), but also in how the organisation is responding to the more holistic needs of the community.

The importance of receiving regular communication about what is happening in the sector, and opportunities available to them, contributed enormously to their sense of feeling connected and being part of the community. The high quality and regularity of the communication was appreciated and commented upon on several occasions:

- *Sense of support both artistically and financially. Being supported by Dance Ireland at a national and international level to make work, and being offered the opportunity to create new work, in particular when times have been difficult for arts funding.*
- *The link to aesthetic and world of dance as someone who is not in a dance company. The use of the space for rehearsals my favourite rehearsal space.*
- *Being connected to main national dance body in Ireland. Residency studio space with hot shower!*
- *I don't have a direct answer to this question. I believe my membership is my way of supporting Dance Ireland as an invaluable resource for and promoter of dance and movement practice and performance in Ireland.*
- *I would love to have a chance to use my membership the next time and find the time to do it. It would help me to gain more confidence in the work I do with active aging groups in Maynooth and Co. Kildare*

The value of being a member of Dance Ireland was explored further in a specific question around value for money. 75% of the current membership agreed that Dance Ireland offers good value for money, 25% disagreed. Most of those who disagreed chose to expand on the reasons for their decision. These included a concern that the organisation operates in a competitive and ‘clientalist’ style rather than adopting a more friendly, democratic and inclusive approach. Improved voting rights for Associate Members<sup>1</sup> was also raised and there is a perception amongst some members that the valuable contribution made to dance in Ireland, and abroad, by educators and academics, is undervalued and unappreciated by Dance Ireland.



The issue of cost and the expense involved in being a member and accessing facilities was raised by several members. A request to offer improved loyalty benefits to members was mentioned and several also pointed out that they found the current fees expensive when compared to other organisations. Suggestions of ways in which this might be addressed included reducing the costs of *Winging It!* and giving free access to morning class if a member is an artist in residence. 81% of lapsed members felt their membership represented value for money, 19% disagreed. Of those who disagreed, the issue of cost arose for several members as well as a sense for those outside Dublin that they weren't in a position to avail of the services and facilities. This also underscores the perception that

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that this is an issue of perception as Associate Members have full voting rights. Only Student members don't have any voting/election to the Board rights. Dance Ireland operates a one member (individual and organisation) one vote process.

Dance Ireland is DanceHouse and that the two are inextricably linked, something that the organisation might wish to address over the next phase of its development.

### What does Dance Ireland do really well?

Providing access to regular class, professional development initiatives and supporting artists to showcase their work internationally were referenced as positive examples of Dance Ireland's work. As is echoed elsewhere in the survey, the opportunity to make and create work, in a positive, safe and custom-built working environment with proper facilities, is absolutely core to the value placed by the membership on the organisation.

In tandem with the facilities, regular communication, the openness of the Executive and staff to members who are seeking advice, guidance and information are also seen as organisational strengths. Several responses referred to the professionalism of the organisation in how it operates and manages DanceHouse and across all aspects of its procedures. Again, special mention was also made of the quality and regularity of the communication with the membership and the value placed on keeping them up to date on news and opportunities.

There is also recognition of its support of both funded and unfunded artists and recent changes that have been implemented, in response to feedback from the members, have also been noticed and appreciated.

*It is a flagship Irish arts organisation – it is exemplary in its facilities, resources, opportunities and platforming of dance in Ireland. I feel I do a multitude of things in DI: learn, work and develop professionally through its facilities and programmes. I have noticed recent additions and changes that make the organisation more open and welcome: a suggestions box, rearranging furniture in the foyer, style of emails and noticeboards for members. I feel these are hugely positive additions.*

Amongst the lapsed members, the range of programmes and opportunities offered by the organisation were highly valued. The quality of the facilities and the fact that there is a permanent home for dance in Ireland was also very much appreciated. The level of communication with the sector and the support for artists at various stages of their careers was also touched upon.

*I think DI genuinely tries to keep the needs of artists at heart, even though different artists have very different expectations. I think the advice and support offered by the team - and the expertise in the main office - is incredibly helpful and generously shared. I have seen how important the residencies, mentorship, international workshops, partnerships with other organisations (e.g. DTF & Theatre forum for Next Stage) are for artist development. I think that its recent EU projects were vital to helping Irish artists make a further impact in Europe.*

## What can Dance Ireland do better?

There are a number of key issues for the membership which are beginning to converge into three broad areas - the role of Dance Ireland (service provider versus lobbying and advocacy agency); the importance of creating a warm, inclusive and welcoming atmosphere in the building; increasing the range and quantity of training and development initiatives i.e. classes, masterclasses, workshops.

There is a clear sense from the members that they look to Dance Ireland to be the voice of the dance sector in Ireland and that it holds a mandate from the membership to represent the interests and concerns of the community to key stakeholders. Lobbying for better conditions for artists and the value of Dance Ireland leveraging its influence to petition for more support for dance was also mentioned.

Recognition of dance as an art form in high profile initiatives such as The Irish Times Theatre Awards was given as an example of how the profile for dance could be improved nationally. The inclusion of four nominations, including Best Director for Michael Keegan Dolan in the 2016 Irish Times Theatre Awards for Teach Damhsa's production of *Swan Lake/Loch na hEala* is both positive and negative; positive in that it recognises the excellence and quality of this artist and the work, but negative in that it further serves to highlight the absence of a dedicated choreography or dance category in this prestigious and highly regarded awards.

The importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere, particularly in the public areas of DanceHouse, was mentioned by several respondents. There is a perception that the building is quite corporate and clinical in its look and feel and that it would benefit from creating a more informal atmosphere with a welcoming and friendly environment.

Suggestions around increasing the range and volume of dance classes included moving to a year round morning class of ballet with a similar class for contemporary dance. Encouraging members to participate in other dance class styles was also mentioned as was the request for additional workshops and opportunities for dancers who do not want to create their own work. Dance Ireland's role in bringing together dance communities, thereby strengthening the professional dance network across Ireland, was suggested by a number of participants. This would also have the added benefit of increasing regional engagement with, and amongst, the sector.

The opportunity for students to become full voting members of Dance Ireland and thereby being able to contribute fully was also raised in this section. The possibility of creating a studio black-box style space in DanceHouse to enable members, who are not in a position to afford a full scale venue production, to showcase their work, was also mentioned on many occasions. Involving the community more through initiatives such as programming regular class was also suggested.

There were a number of responses from the lapsed members which echoed those of the current membership including expanding the range of classes and also the demographic who engage with the organisation i.e. more children and new communities accessing the space. The need for an advocate for dance who can influence and create a change of

attitude at Government and senior official level across the public sector was also emphasised, as was the importance of engaging with the sector outside Dublin.

Creating a more informal atmosphere within the building where members feel welcome to hang out, talk to the staff and expand this principle of ease of access into use of the facilities, in particular the studios, was a key priority. Fringe Lab and Dance Base (Edinburgh) were mentioned as examples of good practice where there is a high degree of flexibility and openness in making space available and letting members know when studios are free.

### Options for Change

Seven ideas were put forward in the survey as possible options for change for Dance Ireland. The suggestions were drawn from feedback from members at earlier Dance Ireland open meetings and were included specifically to gauge the level of support for the ideas from within the membership. They also served the purpose of encouraging respondents towards 'blue sky thinking' and to explore what changes, significant or otherwise, they would like to see take place.

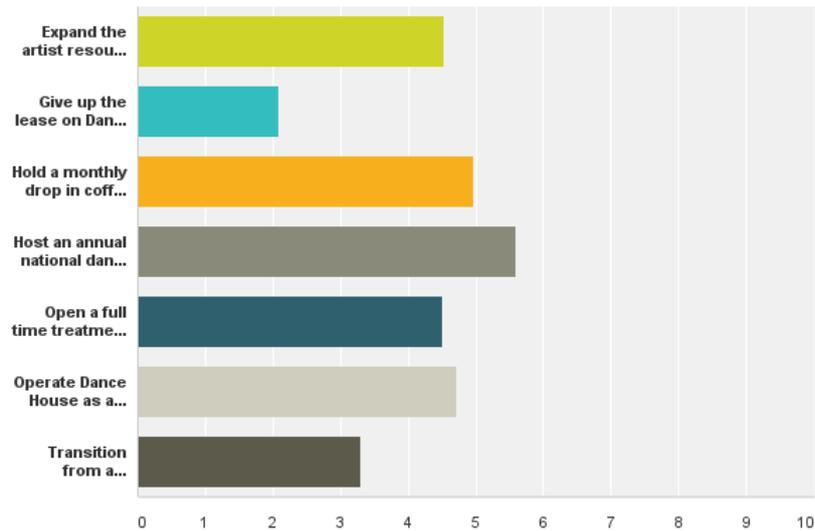
Creating opportunities for the dance sector to network, share information and build stronger links, nationally and internationally, at an annual Dance Conference event was the majority first option. This was echoed by the majority of lapsed members who also selected this option as their first choice.

This resonates with earlier feedback in the survey around the role of Dance Ireland in helping to build cohesion and a sense of community amongst the wider dance sector, both locally and nationally. It also indicates the desire of the membership to determine its own needs and create a sense of confidence in itself as a distinct sector, within and outside of the wider arts community.

The value for the membership of creating informal opportunities to meet, share ideas and discuss issues of relevance to them is a recurring theme emerging from the survey. This was also noted by lapsed members who also selected the hosting of a monthly drop in coffee gathering selected as the majority second preferred option in this list.

**Q15 Which of the following changes, if any, would you like to see Dance Ireland make? [Please rank your answers in order of priority from 1 to 7]**

Answered: 50 Skipped: 59



The possibility of DanceHouse operating as a production hub and providing additional facilities for members, expanding the artist resource room to provide additional hot desks or converting a space into a full time treatment room were rated third, fourth and fifth priorities, respectively. Similarly, the lapsed members also rated the need for a production hub as their third highest priority, closely followed by the expansion of the artist resource room and the opening of a full time treatment room.

It's worth noting that the option of Dance Ireland transitioning from a membership-led to an independent organisation was selected by 28% of the current members as an option (albeit as sixth out of the seven options proposed) with the option of giving up the lease on DanceHouse selected as final option by the majority of respondents. This was also reflected in the responses of lapsed members with both of these options selected sixth and seventh, respectively, in the choices offered. A significant number of the respondents did not include the option of giving up the lease on DanceHouse in their selection.

A small group of respondents made a number of suggestions of additional changes which Dance Ireland might consider in the future. Many of the suggestions surfaced in previous responses and there is a degree of repetition which could be interpreted as members wishing to place a degree of emphasis on some of the proposed changes.

A recurring issue is the provision of a performance space, technically equipped and rigged so as to allow artists to present work, without incurring the costs of hiring an external theatre/performance space. The possibility of having a mini 'production lab', perhaps in partnership with other organisations such as Dublin Dance Festival or Project Arts Centre would be another approach to creating opportunities to present and showcase work within or outside the confines of DanceHouse.

Access to opportunities for mid-career dance artists is also of concern to some members. In a climate of uncertainty around funding and the pressure to manage the administration involved in maintaining a company or producing work, the importance of sustaining practice, ideally in a company/ensemble or collective, surfaced across several responses.

Other suggestions included:

- *Treat the present “crisis” as much as an opportunity as a challenge. Take time to fundamentally examine its function, how it operates and look seriously at other options as to how it can progress. In a sense break out of its present culture to envision a totally different way of being and operation.*
- *How can you go into a profession seriously, if you can’t make a living, pay the rent? These are major issues for dance artists in order to continue; how can dance house address that?*
- *Hiring a dance producer ... access more European funding for creation of new work*
- *Develop an operational theatre space for dance practitioners (ideally in Dance House, but perhaps elsewhere)*
- *Be a more visible advocate and champion for dance beyond the dance sector*

The importance of retaining a connection between the members as dance artists and creators with the overall leadership of the organisation was a recurring issue for lapsed members. There was little support for the option of giving up the lease on the building but a sense that it could be used more or in a different way i.e. as a production house or a place to present work which wouldn’t incur the costs of hiring a theatre or performance space.

The possibility of having on-site physiological support to prevent long-term injuries, particularly with regard to young dancers, was mentioned as was the need for a less formal open work space where members can come to stretch, foam rolling, rehab in an easy communal space.

Other comments included:

- *Also after having read through your suggestions below for change, I think it would be wonderful to transform dance house into a production house and venue that would help to develop audiences year-round. The rest of the suggestions seem to be aimed solely and dance artists and enthusiasts. People already interested or invested in dance and dance house. I think a top priority should be developing audiences and bringing new comers to dance. Maybe transitioning from a members-led to an independent organization would help this...?*
- *I think that members need to participate more, take on their role as members in the organisation. Dance house needs to take an action which facilitates this. Treatment rooms, communal spaces for talking and eating, human scale meetings,*

*transparency. I think there is a question of advocacy among the dance community also. In events like the DF it's kind of sad that Irish dancers get a studio and international dancers get more support. So a more egalitarian approach here would show solidarity I believe. Facilitate members to be more involved in decision making.*

- *I think it would be a disaster if DI were to give up the lease on DanceHouse or to operate it as a fulltime production house and venue. EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DANCE IN DANCEHOUSE [sic] as the centre was built, presumably, using taxpayers money.*
- *A social studio. A less formal open door work space for physical maintenance (sic) and human connection. Not for in depth personal research. But for stretching (sic), rehab, foam rolling etc. In non-isolated environment. Would develop sense of community particularly to help connect more isolated independent artists*

## Members' Priorities

It is clear from the open responses to this question that the issues which have surfaced for the membership regarding the future of Dance Ireland are also closely related to the issues they face within their own practice and organisations. Concerns around sustaining creative practice, finding the right support and environment within which to create the best work, a desire to extend and expand and reach out to new audiences and communities, creating new collaborations and partnerships, are recurring issues for the membership and, arguably, the wider arts community in Ireland. A selection of the responses includes:

### **Most Important**

*Affordable rehearsal space and having space and support to research and create new work*

*A detailed and proper assessment of the role and functions of Dance Ireland in the context of a changing climate within and outside of the arts sector in Ireland*

*Funding to support practice and the employment of artists and creative teams*

*Building international connections and presenting work outside Ireland*

*Stability and security*

*More classes, scholarship opportunities, bursaries, residencies and opportunities for professional development and training opportunities*

*Making good art, creative success*

## **Would really like**

*Continue to create work, create new work,*

*Administration support, access to dance producer, access to cheaper, larger or more secure studio and rehearsal space, financial security and sustainable career path*

*Increase networks, nationally and internationally, create new performance opportunities and partnerships*

*Break down barriers between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' to create a unified dance community*

*Work with disadvantaged communities e.g. prison, special needs and create new work for outreach and education*

## **Need to make time to**

*Create and promote*

*Access European funding and sponsorship to help raise funds to make work and pay artists*

*Engage with other members of the community, exchange expertise, breathe and absorb, collaborate with other artists,*

*Find time to research, publish writing about choreographic practice, attend more talks*

*Be open and welcoming, communicate more with members, engage more personally with dance companies and artists, meet up and build relationships with other dancers, be more outward looking – peers, participants, funders etc.*

## [Member's Suggested Priorities for Dance Ireland](#)

I have included all the responses to this question as it might be useful for Dance Ireland to get a sense of the key themes and issues emerging from the membership and those, in particular, that they would like the organisation to focus on in the immediate future. Not all of these ideas or suggestions can be taken on board by the organisation but it may help to inform future planning and also provide clarity on those areas where initiatives are already being put in place.

- *Examine how it functions as a national body and what are its priorities. 2 Be, encourage and facilitate more openness, inclusiveness and solidarity that can become a real beacon for/of the arts and not just depend on "pr" type spin. 3 Look at its flaws, weaknesses and mistakes*
- *More funding for Dance; publicity for dance performances/projects, opportunities and programs and funding for dance performances and initiatives which further the reach of dance in mainstream life*

- *Helping dancers produce work - get connected to venues, festivals (at home and abroad) to network Continue supporting its programmes: residencies, assoc artist, next stage, training, clinics, sharing of new works More showcases for presenters/promoters/festival directors etc. Building partnerships to raise awareness for dance to create more opportunities for work and funding Access more European funding and programmes like LEIM that focus on funding development of new work so there is wider pool of money in addition to The Arts Council. More commissions by Dance Ireland for creating work (tapping in to Europe and partnering with other orgs, DTF? Galway Arts? other festivals?)*
- *Making its members feel valued and respected and that it is actually a member-led organisation. Listening to the very productive ideas of its experienced members. INCLUSIVITY OF OTHER STYLES RATHER THAN JUST CONTEMPORARY.[sic] Developing working relationships and ongoing conversations with its members, actually knowing what is going on in the careers and interests of young dancers starting out as well as the more experienced. This awareness can then inform the path Dance Ireland can take to support this. If you don't know what the dancers in Ireland are doing (all dancers not just contemporary dancers) then how can you be a representative of them?*
- *Making dance relevant to the arts sector. Maintain sustainability Increase funds for the creation and practice of the Artform*
- *I think DI have been doing really good, perhaps the priority should be in catering for the dance community in all its aspects and stages of dance from amateur to professional. From kids to adults that practice dance regardless of if it is professional or not...*
- *International Profile*
- *A cafe! Continue providing daily class, information and support for artists all under one roof*
- *A way to support members in the development of their practice that does not involve financial support*
- *the young members that trained abroad and are have many skills to share from around Europe and beyond*
- *offer more residency programs, have access to accommodation, continue to become more open*
- *Provision of more level-specific classes - e.g. beginner, advanced, elderly, etc.*
- *A more open relationship with the arts council to give dance in Ireland a voice that pushes for more opportunities and more companies.*
- *Look outside Dublin*

- *Elevating dance to be recognised as an artform in the eyes of Revenue such that they can receive tax exemption. - Refining and channelling the exceptional work the organisation has been carrying out for years. - Building, strengthening and nourishing the dance community (and its members) to become resilient, strong*
- *Operate more workshops toward the creation of new dance theatre or dance film. Make the ground fertile for emerging artists.*
- *Outreach and diversify support*
- *Possibly prioritising the developmental role of the organisation as the leading resource agency for dance nationally. Leading on ways in which the sector can work together - finding moments of commonality*
- *I like the idea of it being a real hub for dance. The notion of it being a venue as well as a support venue is quite good.*
- *Continue to be responsive to sector needs of both for independent companies and individual dance artists*
- *Campaigning to The Arts Council to increase funding for Dance*
- *Inclusive policy (i.e. support non-mainstream dance)*
- *Artists age 35+. this age group are unhappy as there are lots of opportunities for young emerging dancer/choreographers that we are not eligible for. funding is not shared out. only one touring award makes no sense. if do representing Ireland, should help us follow up on it, advise us what's the next best move, advise how to set up and go about touring/presenting work at home and abroad. another idea is to sit down with each and help devise a plan. be honest and give advice, feedback on what best to do next. international relationships/exchanges. advise on cdp etc.*
- *Security for dance artist working in this particularly perilous sector. Improve conditions and build a better future for the next generation*
- *Engagement with companies and artists throughout island - but we appreciate this needs wider support and interest among members*
- *Independent artists and students of dance, the most vulnerable*
- *Listening to the needs and desires of the dance community and to make them happen*
- *Welcoming, free studio space for development of new work on a case by case basis outside of residencies, project planning / financial support, longer term training programs e.g. Certifications in Laban/Feldenkrais, ISMETA etc. This might aid gaining further employment for dancers*
- *Supporting ALL styles of dance*

- *expand to involve teachers who are hopefully training dancers of the future, preferably to be able to stay, train and work in Ireland*
- *Daily ballet class*
- *Support and funding*
- *Advocacy - support the development of an audience for dance*
- *Aiding the career development of its members. By engaging with the needs of working artists. And the field they work i.e. festivals production houses. Platforms*
- *Continue to offer a comprehensive service to the wider dance community*
- *Inclusivity community development*
- *Morning classes (ballet, contemporary, yoga) for professional dancers, actors and office workers in the area. - help produce and promote dance makers - help network in the community/industry. be a gathering force in community of hobby dancers, professional dancers, dance schools, venues and towards other artforms.*
- *Bringing in a larger number of dancers for morning class. This can only be done if there are scheduled ballet and contemporary classes every day.*
- *Increase membership*
- *Communication with the members*
- *Continued leadership in the sector/DanceHouse as a hub and engine; developmental initiatives and youth dance development*
- *Developing DH as a performance space*

Just under a third of the lapsed members who completed the survey included a response to this question. The need to expand the audience for dance and, by association, those who visit DanceHouse was seen as important for the future of the organisation. There is a perception that it is the same group of people who use the space, attend dance shows and create work. There is a wider community of people interested in dance and resources need to be invested to draw them in to the Dance Ireland family. There was also a need for Dance Ireland to prioritise engagement with the public and with the wider community of dance practitioners in order to help build a stronger community and awareness of dance.

Creating new models to present work and the development of a national dance strategy for touring work, building a touring network for dance in Ireland and abroad, identifying opportunities and initiatives which will enhance the profile of dance in the national print and broadcast media were also proposed. Creating a culture of openness to change and responding to the needs of artists and the membership was also mentioned with the example given of an annual meeting where decisions emanating from this review could be discussed and amended, if necessary.

## Additional Feedback

The final question in the survey was deliberately open so as to provide the membership with an opportunity to share any further thoughts, ideas or feedback on areas which may not have been covered in the survey.

There is a strong perception from the membership that Dance Ireland is actively and genuinely seeking their input and opinion regarding the future direction of the organisation and how it can better respond to their needs and those of the sector in general. This perceived shift in behaviour from what is seen to be a corporate style to a more open, welcoming, inclusive and responsive approach is very welcome.

The role of Dance Ireland and DanceHouse as a hub for artists to meet, share ideas and information and connect with each other is vital to building a sense of community amongst the sector. An open coffee area which is visible and easily accessible would help to create a more welcoming atmosphere, increase access and visibility as well as helping to foster new relationships in an informal and friendly environment.

There is a genuine appreciation from across a range of members, from choreographers to organisations and dance associates, of the work of Dance Ireland and the important role it plays in the Irish and international arts and cultural sector. The value of what is seen to be a very visible active listening process with increased and more meaningful communication with and amongst the membership is also welcomed and encouraged.

Several of the members expressed a genuine sense of pride and privilege to be part of the dance community in Ireland and their relationship with Dance Ireland is seen as a key contributor and enabler of this.

The role of Dance Ireland in creating, supporting and nurturing opportunities for all those who are working in the dance sector in Ireland is held in high esteem by the members. As a membership organisation, it is also imperative that the qualities of transparency and fairness are core principles of the organisation to ensure that all members are given the opportunity to participate fully across all aspects of Dance Ireland's work.

A number of members articulated the need for the organisation to ensure that it is representing the range and diversity of dance practice happening in Ireland, to ensure the avoidance of a hierarchy amongst forms (contemporary over ballet for example).

Helping dance artists to sustain their practice and assisting them in finding new ways to support their work is a key concern for some members, who in turn look to Dance Ireland to provide additional financial support, advice or ideas as to how they might unlock opportunities to create new work.

- *It is such a pleasure and privilege to be a member of DI and the dance community. I look forward to remaining an advocate and supporter of dance in Ireland and a member of the community for years to come.*

A small group of lapsed members also opted to include responses to this open question. Finding the resources to cover the cost of membership is a challenge for some, as are

changes in their personal circumstances, particularly in terms of parenting and childcare, have impacted upon their ability to avail of the services.

However, there is a strong sense of appreciation for what Dance Ireland contributes to the community and to dance in Ireland and the importance of its role in the development of dance in the future.

- *It's still a great thing to have in Dublin. So fair play!*
- *Thanks so much for inviting me to share my thoughts. As before we have an amazing resource in Dance Ireland and Dance House. I would like to support it more and I would like to feel more supported. Thank you!*
- *I feel Dance Ireland has really turned a corner in recent times and I'm looking forward to seeing what's in store.*
- *I'm happy this survey was done. It feels empowering to be heard.*
- *I'm so glad that there is a feedback session*
- *Sending you all the positive vibes in the world. Thank you for working to establish a thriving industry for future generations.*