

Contents

Executive Summary

This report encapsulates the findings from student engagement and stakeholder research exercises conducted by National Youth Ballet. The aim of this research was to explore the question: *“How can ballet be taught in a more inclusive way at pre-vocational and vocational level?”*

The objectives of this research were manifold: understand the barriers to access and inclusion at schools, colleges and universities for students pursuing dance courses; determine positive, realistic and achievable actions that could address these barriers and ensure a better experience for students with varying needs; and think about the next steps that National Youth Ballet could take to encourage change in this area.

This research was relevant and timely, following the growth of National Youth Ballet’s inclusive programme ‘All In!’ which included the development of a steering group (featuring industry professionals, dance organisations, freelancers, artists, teachers and students) alongside partnership creation and practical workshops and performances. Throughout the programme, stakeholders and students with lived experience told National Youth Ballet of the need to interrogate current practices and processes for dance students at pre-vocational and vocational level and the barriers they faced to a) succeeding on their course (in terms of academic attainment and personal health and wellbeing) and b) developing a career in dance.

During conversations and consultation, several key topics emerged that significantly impacted student inclusion and access:

- **Institutional Culture and Processes:** including changing attitudes about inclusion/access, institutional-wide culture shifts and ensuring appropriate time and resource is dedicated to inclusion.
- **The Student Journey:** including finding effective ways to share access needs, integration with other students, communication and accommodation.
- **In the Studio:** including the importance of using open language, encouraging differentiation and creating individualised development plans.

Key Recommendations

Institutional Culture and Processes	The Student Journey	In the Studio
-Institutional wide training and advocacy implemented to ensure greater awareness and understanding of access and inclusion. -Resource allocation considers the additional time/money needed to effectively implement adjustments.	-Access riders asked for as standard, meaningfully implemented and effectively shared with staff and guest artists.Support offered to create an access rider if needed.	-Open, non-specific language used to encourage inclusion, translation and differentiation. -Individualised development plans created to ensure students are able to learn by methods that suit them and are pushed.

	-Students have regular 1:1s with a support worker or tutor to support their development and wellbeing.	
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Reflections on this work

It is important to acknowledge that each student and each institution is different and there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. National Youth Ballet encourages that institutions work individually with students to identify their unique needs and explore which actions they can immediately implement, and which may take longer.

National Youth Ballet's Next Steps

National Youth Ballet will seek to share research and encourage conversations with schools, colleges and universities to explore how it can support change for better inclusion and access. National Youth Ballet will also look to develop resources and CPD, in consultation with the All In! Steering Group, to help promote positive action and greater access to ballet and dance at pre-vocational and vocational levels for all students.

National Youth Ballet's All In! is supported by Parable Dance (project partner).

Table of Findings, Actions, Recommendations & Rationale

Finding	Action	Rationale or Evidence Basis
Institutional Culture and Processes		
Adjustments and access need to be embedded at all stages of the academic journey and across the whole programme, process and institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Implement institutional wide training and advocacy to develop understanding about access and inclusion. -Work with a consultant or specialist to identify areas to develop, 	The research group talked about the importance of an institutional wide positive culture and approach to disability and access for an overall meaningful and holistic student experience. They talked about the need for consistency, empathy and understanding, and for upskilling staff where needed about access and inclusion.

	including communication and processes.	
Institutions need more resources (time, money, staff) to properly embed access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Allocate resources appropriately to ensure access needs can be properly and effectively met. -Consider a specialist role to support access and inclusion. 	Individuals talked about how they sometimes felt there wasn't the resource (time, money, staff) for their needs to be properly implemented (e.g. if someone needed additional 1:1 support, this might not always be accounted for in budgets or staff time). The research group did mention, however, that institutions might use not having enough resource as an 'excuse' not to meet access needs, and that prioritisation of access means equality and equity for students.
Access taken seriously, and a culture shift instigated so students don't feel they are 'difficult' or a 'nuisance'.	Implement institutional wide training and advocacy to develop understanding about access and inclusion.	Individuals explained how, when they were asking for adjustments or for their needs to be supported, they could often feel like they were being 'difficult' or a 'nuisance', particularly when they required a change in process or delivery. This could lead to students not wishing to share their needs and/or unhappy experiences during their course.
Need to address systemic barriers and ableist attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement training specifically focused on the social model of disability and identifying ableist practices within dance education. 	Research highlighted the importance of addressing systemic barriers rather than viewing disability as an individual "problem" to be solved. This approach helps create lasting institutional change.
Board-level representation needs strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively recruit people with lived experience of disability to board positions - Create advisory panels of disabled dancers and teachers 	The research group emphasised how having disabled representation at board level was essential for ensuring access needs are properly understood and prioritised in strategic planning and resource allocation. They noted that without this representation, access considerations often remain peripheral rather than central to institutional decision-making.
Role models need proper support and compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure all disabled role models, guest teachers, and consultants are properly compensated - Create paid positions rather than relying on voluntary work 	The research group highlighted how many institutions rely on voluntary work from disabled artists and consultants. They emphasised that proper compensation is essential for creating sustainable relationships with disabled dance professionals and demonstrates genuine institutional commitment to inclusion rather than tokenistic engagement.
Need for dedicated access support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create a specialist role focused on supporting disabled staff and students with Access to Work, Direct 	Individuals described how access support was often fragmented or inconsistent without dedicated expertise in place. They emphasised that having a specialist who understands both dance and disability rights helps ensure proper support is identified and implemented effectively across all aspects of training.

	<p>Payments, and other support schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure this person has expertise in both dance and disability rights 	
Communication methods need to be more diverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create social stories with symbols for all regular activities - Implement visual timetables using Makaton symbols - Ensure these resources are available both digitally and physically 	<p>The research group discussed how relying on a single communication method creates barriers for many students. They emphasised that providing information in multiple formats (visual, written, audio) ensures all students can access important information in ways that work best for their individual learning styles and access needs.</p>
Representation in delivery teams needs structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish minimum requirements for inclusion of people with lived experience in teaching and creative teams - Create mentoring opportunities for disabled dance practitioners 	<p>Individuals emphasised how having disabled teachers and creative practitioners on delivery teams provides authentic perspectives on accessibility and important role models for students. They noted this representation helps challenge assumptions about who can teach dance and provides practical insights into inclusive teaching methods.</p>
The Student Journey		
Institutions communicate honestly about their commitment to access and inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At Open Days, on websites and in marketing, institutions are clear on how they are committed to access and inclusion. - Information about the course is accessible (e.g. available in a variety of formats). 	<p>The research group emphasised the importance of openness and specificity from institutions about what they can/cannot provide in terms of access and inclusion. They said it was important this was communicated at the early stages of contact to set expectations and for students to understand if an institution has a positive approach to access. They also suggested that institutions could look at widening how information about a course is provided (e.g. providing in easy read, audio and video formatting), if not done already.</p>
Access needs aren't always asked about or considered and aren't always implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access Riders asked for as standard, at the earliest point of contact, and explored in more depth with each student to create meaningful Learning Agreements. 	<p>Individuals outlined how being asked for access riders could be helpful for institutions to be able to understand and meet needs. They suggested that registration and induction might include asking for access riders as a standard part of the process and meaningful learning agreements created prior to starting a course to ensure the best possible experience and outcomes for the student.</p>
Finding suitable accommodation can be a barrier to access.	<p>Administrative staff support students to find suitable accommodation.</p>	<p>Some individuals commented how unsuitable accommodation (e.g. inaccessible or too far away from campus) was a barrier for them to access their course and to engage more widely with student activities. They suggested that more support</p>

		from staff to help find suitable accommodation could make a big positive impact to their experience and wellbeing.
Integration with other students can be challenging.	-Inductions include disability awareness training for students to remove 'fear' and encourage understanding.	The research group expressed how they often felt isolated and struggled to integrate with other students who perhaps weren't sure how to engage with them. They suggested that disability awareness training for students could help to remove stigma and fear and support integration.
Students have regular check ins and be able to communicate freely about how they are finding the course.	Students to have a designated 1:1, support worker or tutor with regular meetings organised.	Individuals commented how regular check ins with a support worker or staff member trained in inclusive practices might help them to communicate any challenges or difficulties and ensure their needs are met on an ongoing basis through advocacy and development of Learning Agreements.
Students often repeat their needs to different staff.	Access needs communicated effectively between staff.	Individuals explained how repeating their access needs to different staff members can be tiring or, if they are unaware a staff member doesn't know about their needs, means a class may be inaccessible for them. They suggested that this was an extra barrier for them to meaningfully and positively engage with a course.
Students can be negatively marked because of their access needs.	-Assessments take into consideration adjustments and not mark down if someone is translating movement. -Students not marked down if they need to miss class.	Individuals talked about how they might be marked down in assessments for translating movement, even if they had been encouraged to do so during class. A consistent approach is needed to ensure that adjustments from class are carried into assessments. Individuals also talked about how they might be marked down if they needed to miss class due to their disability/health condition and felt fair consideration wasn't always given to their needs in these instances.
In the Studio		
Teachers need to be more proactive in asking students about their access needs and implementing adjustments.	-Ensure there is time and opportunity for students to meet with teachers to share access needs. -Develop effective methods of sharing a student's access needs across staff so they don't have to repeat themselves. -Improve communication channels for sharing students' access requirements with guest teachers	Many of the research group highlighted how, often, teachers hadn't seen their access rider or didn't know about their access needs, meaning a class wasn't accessible to them or that they had to quickly share what they needed at the start of a class. This often led to them feeling like they were wasting other students' time at the beginning of a class or that they didn't have enough time and opportunity to properly share their needs with a teacher and ensure that these needs were met in class. They also commented how guest artists wouldn't have access information shared with them, leading to the same problems as above.

	and ensure to follow up to make sure that they are understood.	
Language used in the dance studio isn't always inclusive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - French terminology could work like Universal Design, providing a shared vocabulary that each dancer can interpret through their own physicality and already requiring translation for dancers, creating natural equity. - Teachers to use open language that encourages differentiation (e.g. 'move around the space' rather than 'walk around the space') 	<p>Individuals reported feeling more included and confident when teachers used non-prescriptive terms that focused on movement intention rather than specific physical actions. Teachers in the research group noted that this approach naturally encouraged creative problem-solving and allowed students to interpret movements through their own physicality.</p> <p>Multiple participants described how open language removed assumptions about physical capabilities and reduced anxiety about 'doing it wrong.' They observed that when teachers described movement in terms of quality and intention rather than specific physical actions, students felt more empowered to find their own movement solutions. Teachers also reported that using inclusive language improved overall class engagement and participation.</p> <p>The group emphasised that consistent use of open language, combined with multiple methods of describing movement (visual, metaphorical, directional), supported different learning styles and allowed all dancers to engage more fully with the material. This approach was seen as particularly effective when integrated with traditional ballet terminology, creating a richer, more accessible learning environment.</p>
Teachers can sometimes 'give up' if someone doesn't understand what they're asking.	Develop individualised training plans to understand how someone needs to learn and the steps needed to ensure they understand what is being asked of them.	Some individuals commented that teachers might 'give up' trying to explain a task to them if they didn't understand the first time. They suggested that considering a wide range of learning styles, alongside developing individualised training plans and taking time to understand someone's learning needs might help understanding.
A broad tone can be helpful (e.g. "Go and 'write' notes" isn't inclusive).	Teachers to consider language used and, where possible, offer broader options (e.g. 'make notes however best suits you').	The group highlighted how broad language can create an accessible and inclusive studio where everyone's learning styles and needs are supported and encouraged.

Verbal instructions on their own can be a barrier to learning.	Teachers to use a broad range of methods such as mime, pictures, video and symbols alongside verbal instructions.	The research group emphasised how teaching incorporating a broad range of learning styles might support inclusive delivery and ensure a wide range of students understand what is being asked of them.
Uniforms can be restricting and a barrier.	Offer flexible uniform options (e.g. trousers/shorts alongside leotards).	The research group stressed how strict uniform policies could be a barrier to engagement and to student confidence/wellbeing.
Gender stereotyping avoided.	Teachers to not define steps by gender or assume gender.	The group encouraged teachers to be open and broad with how they delivered a class, particularly around using gendered language. They suggested that open language might support a wider range of students to feel confident and express themselves.
Body autonomy encouraged.	Teachers to use language such as “using ends of the body” rather than “using hands/feet”.	Individuals highlighted how broader language might encourage greater inclusion and access, particularly with body diversity, but also for any student who might need flexibility on any given day.
Differentiation and interpretation encouraged.	Teachers to offer and encourage translations and creative interpretation of tasks.	Individuals commented that a teacher’s willingness to offer and encourage translations and interpretation could make a positive impact on how inclusive and accessible a class was, particularly when done meaningfully and consistently.
People with disabilities can still be pushed.	Develop individualised training plans to understand how someone can be pushed and developed.	Some individuals suggested that they often feel like they aren’t pushed or challenged because they have a disability. They thought that this was perhaps because a teacher wasn’t sure on how they could be challenged or wasn’t sure how to deliver a class that catered for a range of needs whilst still being difficult.
If someone needs to sit out they don’t always want a ‘role’ to do (e.g. critiquing others).	Check in with students first about whether they want to be given a ‘role’ or if they just want to observe.	Some of the research group commented how if they needed to sit out (e.g. to rest) a teacher often asked them to critique their fellow students. This could lead to some of their peers resenting them and can be tiring also if someone needs to rest.
There needs to be an attitude change of what ‘inclusion’ is so it’s not seen as less serious or just ‘contemporary dance’.	Implement institutional wide training and advocacy to develop understanding about inclusive dance.	Individuals highlighted how they often felt that labelling something as ‘inclusive’ made them feel that it wasn’t as serious or that it wasn’t ‘ballet’. The group also suggested that, often, ‘inclusion’ and ‘access’ are used as buzzwords without proper understanding or action and that there is a need for everyone in an institution to meaningfully engage with, and prioritise, awareness training.
Need for consistent spatial awareness support	- Implement system of floor markers/dots for centre work	The research group discussed how many students benefit from having clear spatial reference points in the studio. They noted that consistent physical markers help students develop better spatial awareness, increase confidence in

	- Create clear visual guidelines for spatial awareness	movement execution, and provide important orientation cues that support independent navigation of the space.
Support ratios need consideration	- Establish guidelines for leader/helper to participant ratios -Create flexible support systems based on individual needs -Consider implementing peer support systems	Individuals emphasised how class size and support ratios significantly impact learning experiences. They described how having appropriate numbers of teaching assistants and support staff enables more individualised attention, ensures safety, and allows all students to participate fully in class activities without feeling rushed or overlooked.
Class structure needs more consistency	- Implement structured repetition of exercises across multiple classes - Create clear progression plans that account for different learning paces	The research group highlighted how inconsistent class structure can create barriers to learning. They observed that regular repetition of exercises across multiple classes helps students internalise movement patterns, builds confidence through familiarity, and allows students to progress at their own pace while maintaining engagement.
Creative work needs more structure	- Develop framework for offering choreographic choices - Create bank of well-known stories suitable for translation - Establish clear guidelines for setting creative tasks that support different communication needs	Individuals described how overly open-ended creative tasks can create barriers for some students. They suggested that providing clear frameworks and guidelines for creative work helps students feel confident in their artistic choices while still maintaining creative freedom, and ensures all students can engage meaningfully with choreographic tasks.
Other Points		
Students need role models and to ‘see’ themselves within the institution and their course.	- Work with a diverse range of teachers and guest artists. -Plan trips to see a diverse range of performances. -Explore representation across the institution.	The research group emphasised the idea that ‘if you can’t see it, you can’t be it’, with diverse role models vital to enhancing inclusion and access within courses. They suggested that courses might consider working with a diverse range of teachers and artists, alongside thinking about an institution’s wider EDI policy and approach.
Timetabling and course structures aren’t always accessible.	Flexible modules could support access needs	Some individuals said that timetables and course structures could conflict with their access needs (e.g. if someone needed longer in the morning to get up and ready but they had a regular class at 8am). They suggested considering ways in which timetables could be more flexible to support access needs.

<p>Access considered outside of class and the institution (e.g. on trips).</p>	<p>Staff to ensure access needs are supported and adjustments implemented on extra-curricular activities such as trips.</p>	<p>The research group highlighted how, sometimes, whilst access needs might be considered within a class or within an institution, if they went on an extra-curricular trip (e.g. to the theatre), their needs weren't always accommodated or remembered.</p>
<p>Disabled students can feel isolated and excluded</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think about ways to create a support network for disabled dancers in auditions and training. - Student Unions support with creating a group or network for disabled dancers. - Create a quiet space that can also be a space for gentle social interaction 	<p>Some individuals commented how they often felt isolated and lacked being able to talk to other people with disabilities to share their experiences and support each other. They suggested a network might be facilitated, perhaps by the Students' Union, to help with this.</p>

Appendix 1 – Access Rider Information: <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/resource/creating-your-own-access-rider/>