**DLG & Critical Mass What Next 2022-2024**

**Evaluation**

**Introduction & Context**

**DLG Background**

Dance Leaders Group (formerly Dance Development Leaders Group) is a professional network of over 70 member organisations and independent practitioners from the West Midlands dance sector, committed to developing dance participation in the region. The group founded and co-ordinated by Arts Connect and formed in 2018, DLG pioneered a creative enquiry action research approach to learning and development, beginning with an *Experiential Learning Exchange Sequence,* in which dance participation professionals were paired across the region and across different sizes and types of organisation to exchange practice. *#DanceConnect R&D* evolved in response to the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, setting the scene for the Steering Group to secure additional funding for *Beyond Borders 2021* and to negotiate an exceptional partnership with Birmingham 2022 Festival team to deliver *Critical Mass* as a high profile signature of the Commonwealth Games.

*DLG & Critical Mass What Next 2022-24* was developed in consultation with the DLG group, initially as part of the biannual DLG Summit, and then by a volunteer Advisory Group who shaped the initial ideas into a coherent proposal**.**

For more information about how DLG is led and managed, please see Appendix 1 on page 22.

**About The Project**

The purpose of this project was to enable the next stage of Dance Leaders Group (DLG) development, towards enhanced leadership and greater diversity, resilience and sustainability.

DLG & Critical Mass What Next 2022-2024 project comprised three interlinked strands which aimed to realise funders investment priorities alongside DLG’s strategic goals over a 20 month period. These were:

* Network Leadership and Advocacy
* Learning and Skills Development
* Sustainability and Resilience

Project activity was focused across the West Midlands region to develop the regional offer for dance professionals to connect, collaborate, innovate, diversify, learn and grow. DLG wished to build on its position as independent of any one dance organisation and not an organisation in its own right and also, to build on the distinctive, culturally democratic approach that has characterised its effectiveness to date.

The Project was funded by Arts Connect, Dance Hub Birmingham and Birmingham 2022 Festival with additional in kind support from FABRIC, Birmingham Royal Ballet and members of Dance Leaders Group (DLG).

**Project Aims**

1. To strengthen the region-wide network of dance participation leaders
2. To diversify the people and voices who lead the work of DDLG
3. To support growth in the dance sector and new business models
4. To enhance talent retention and development opportunities
5. To build digital opportunities to innovate and build new audiences for dance, especially young people.
6. To build on Critical Mass learning around inclusive integrated work and professional participatory practice development; amplify outcomes and legacy

**Enquiry Themes**

DLG has previously established a creative enquiry, action research approach to learning and development. For this Project, aims were pursued by focusing activity, engagement, collaboration and reflection around the following enquiry questions, which were developed in consultation with the wider DLG community:

1. How to catalyse increased reach, connectivity, growth at sub-regional and regional level?
2. How to embed and develop inclusive and integrated practice across the Midlands
3. How best to amplify the outcomes and build on the legacy of Critical Mass in the Midlands?
4. How to diversify the people and voices who lead the work of DLG?
5. How to pilot an innovative joined up approach to professional development, placements and internships for dance professionals at all levels of experience, to enhance talent retention
6. How to build new audiences for dance in the region, live and online?
7. How to involve and engage young people across a range of dance and physical performance styles and those not currently involved in dance?
8. How to maintain the vision, ethos, values of DLG and to ensure that the quality and qualities of the work that happens is consistent with these?

**Summary of Activities & Outputs**

The Project was undertaken over 2 phases:

Phase 1 (Pilot): October 2022 - March 2023.

Phase 2: April 2023 - June 2024

**Network Leadership & Advocacy**

* Steering group comprised of representatives from FABRIC, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Mercurial Dance, Orit Azaz, and in year 1, Arts Connect met fortnightly
* Dedicated Project Advisory Group comprised of independent professionals, representatives from funded organisations, young people and people who identify as disabled met monthly
* Six Sub-Regional Hubs were established, each with a dedicated Convenor, Senior Ambassador and Youth Ambassador, working for approximately 16 days equivalent over a 4 - 6 month period.. Each Sub-Regional Hub focused activity and reflection in their area around 2- 3 creative enquiry questions.
* Sub-Regional Hub teams involved in the Pilot Phase and Phase 2 met together monthly to share learning and explore potential for collaboration
* Bespoke mentoring program for each Youth Ambassador.
* 4x DLG Summits, which brought together the Midlands dance network twice per year
* Recruitment of a Project Manager to oversee delivery.

**Learning & Skills Development**

* A series of 3 ‘Access Support – Online Drop-in surgeries’, and 2 ‘[In Conversation With](https://fabric.dance/resources/inclusive-resources/in-conversation-with-critical-mass-leaders/)’ conferences, with Critical Mass key player guest speakers: Rachel Liggitt (Inclusion Champion) and Zoie Goulding (Lead Artist, Critical Mass). Both piloted March 2023.
* A series of18 free CPD sessions and masterclasses, co-curated with DLG members, sub regional hub teams and linked to other strands of the project- 11 of which were online, and 7 in person
* Specialist guest speakers including Musa Motha (Freelance Dance Artist), Steve Ball (Birmingham Arts School) and Caroline Miller (Birmingham Royal Ballet)

**Sustainability & Resilience**

* Recruitment and work with INSIGHT consultancy company on DLG brand identity. An inclusive consultation process involving 12 DLG members resulted in new DLG mission, vision, values statement and visual identity / toolkit
* Investment in new DLG web presence, including website & social media
* ‘How To Survive & Thrive Working in Dance and Dance Participation’- Research Into Sustainable Business Models For Dance undertaken by Oliver Scott
* A ‘Dance in Education’ working strategy group was convened, comprising 13 representatives with diverse backgrounds in dance education, who met 6 times. The group decided to focus on creation of 4 interlinked advocacy films; additional funds were secured and the films completed May 2024 and disseminated July - November 2024

**Evaluation Process**

Reflection was embedded into the project process, as follows:

* Project Advisory Group Padlet
* Sub Regional Hub Padlet
* Sub-Regional Hubs Monthly meetings
* Sub Regional Hub final evaluation meetings
* Project Advisory Group final evaluation meeting
* Survey questionnaires for Sub Regional Hub teams, Learning & Skills CPD, Dance in Education Strategy Group & Project Advisory Group

The reflections, learning and feedback gathered through these mechanisms have informed the ongoing development and delivery of the Project; in particular from Phase One Pilot into Phase Two. The documentation has been considered by the Project Manager, Project Advisory Group and DLG Steering Group to establish what has been achieved in relation to project aims and what has been learnt to inform future DLG activity.

**How Successful Was The Project in Achieving Its Aims?**

**Aim 1: To strengthen the region-wide network of dance participation leaders**

The region-wide network of dance participation leaders has been significantly strengthened as a result of all strands of the project. In particular, through:

The piloting and establishment of **6 Sub Regional Hubs,** with Convenor, Senior Ambassador and Youth Ambassador roles working together as team and also, linking up across sub-regions. These were funded for a period of 4 months each, in two cohorts. It is testimony to the impact of this work that all Hub Convenors are now in regular contact with the community of interest and practice in their area/specialism and continue to be engaged in DLG, actively seeking opportunities for collaboration across the region and contributing to DLG Steering Group and Project Advisory Group. A joint DLG bid for Inclusive Communities Fund included proposals from all 6 Sub Regional Hubs, building on their discussions with respective communities. The model of Sub Regional Hubs has also provided a framework for convening of new hubs, including in Shropshire and for African Diaspora dance professionals.

The Sub-Regional Hubs were as follows:

**Phase One (Pilot)**

**Coventry and Warwickshire** - Convened by Oliver Scott (Mercurial Dance)

**Black Country** - Convened by Maggie Lewis (Black Country Dance Hub)

**Hereford and Worcestershire** - Convened by Clare Wood (Dancefest)

**Phase Two**

**Burton & East Staffordshire** - Convened by Charlie Birtles, Catherine Clissett & Owen Hurcombe (Brewhouse Arts Centre)

**Stoke on Trent & North Staffordshire** - Convened by Rachael Lines (FRONTLINEdance)

**W Mids South Asian Dance Network** - Convened by Piali Ray / Sabra Khan (SAMPAD)

The Sub Regional Hubs documented their activities here: [DDLG Sub regional network groups (padlet.com)](https://padlet.com/oritazaz/ddlg-sub-regional-network-groups-aoh1wvvrxxdteiht)

**Learning & Skills** programme, developed in consultation with the wider DLG group and co-promoted with the Sub Regional Hubs, particularly in Phase 2, as a focus and support for their activities.

**4 x DLG Summits** provided an opportunity to bring together people from across the region, working in different contexts and dance forms and to provide a platform for diverse leaders and voices from across the network. These events have been pivotal in communicating, reflecting on and developing the Project. Attendance has grown over the course of the Project from 40 people in Autumn 2023 to 59 people in Spring 2024, with a marked increase in attendees from across the region, catalysed by Sub-Regional Hubs, and diversity of attendees, in terms of range of contexts, geographies and dance styles.

**Project Manager** role - an opportunity for two independent professionals to work as leaders and facilitators within the DLG group, gain an understanding of the whole ecology and the opportunities and challenges for co-operation and collaboration.

**Digital Communication, Identity & Branding** - members of the Steering Group and Project Advisory Group recruited and worked with INSIGHT to articulate mission, vision, values for DLG and develop content to support understanding, recruitment, development of DLG. This material provided visual identity and content for a new website and social media presence. The process enabled 12 DLG members, including early career and independent professionals to experience a professional branding process and to contribute to articulation of DLG, thereby further strengthening the regionwide network and also, diversifying the people and voices that lead DLG.

**Learning & Recommendations**

**Sub-regional Hubs**

The enquiry themes provided a clear focus and framework for Hub teams to update on progress and share learning both within each cohort and with the wider DLG community (who contributed to these themes/questions). Each Hub selected 2-3 themes to focus on while the Project Advisory Group maintained oversight and reflected regularly on all the themes. Padlet provided a useful and democratic platform for Hubs to document and share updates, and to work alongside Project Advisory Group in reflecting on learning in relation to the enquiry themes.

The learning from Phase One pilot enabled clearer articulation of objectives and resources to inform Phase Two Hubs. They also benefited from the Identity and Branding work undertaken with INSIGHT as this resulted in a visual identity and set of resources articulating what DLG is.

Hub Convenors and Ambassadors reported varying degrees of success in achieving project aims and enquiry themes, with notable achievements in establishing communication channels, organising training sessions, and fostering partnerships with local organisations. They reported that their work has strengthened the networks in their respective areas.

Hubs succeeded in engaging diverse communities, including secondary school students and marginalised groups, through inclusive dance sessions and outreach activities. Valuable lessons were learned in navigating barriers to participation and fostering collaboration within the dance ecology of each sub-region. Hubs found one of the most effective methods for connecting their networks was via training and CPD with wraparound activities such as classes and networking meetings. Key learning was that a more solid offer attracts more participants than networking alone.

Moving forward, Sub Regional Hub Convenors plan to sustain the legacy of the work by continuing training programmes, maintaining communication networks, and furthering engagement with diverse stakeholders. The Hub role enables Convenors to represent the interests, needs and priorities of their local networks in the wider DLG context, pushing new ideas forwards.

The experience has underscored the importance of ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and support networks within the dance sector, and Hub participants are committed to sustaining and building upon the progress achieved through the DLG sub-regional hubs. Through continued engagement, consultation, and strategic planning, they aim to further enhance connectivity, inclusivity, and collaboration across their sub-regions, contributing to the growth and vitality of the regional dance ecosystem.

There is a strong desire amongst the 6 Sub Regional Hubs to continue the work begun through this project; and interest expressed by DLG members in other areas to adopt this model. For those Hubs which were convened by organisations with paid staff, it is hoped that they may find a way to continue with their Convenor role - particular as engagement with the wider community of practice provides compelling evidence of need for funding applications and partnership development.

However, for freelancers or Convenors from independent organisations, this will be challenging without additional resources and infrastructure. DLG is actively seeking resources to enable Sub Regional Hubs to respond to the needs of their respective communities. For future initiatives, it would be good to offer greater clarity from the outset about what ongoing support can and cannot be provided.

**Project Management in relation to Sub Regional Hubs**

Challenges were encountered particularly regarding invoicing and payments, which need to be prioritised in future to demonstrate the value placed on hubs for DLG.

Feedback suggested areas for improvement in project management and coordination, where meeting frequency was difficult to commit to and agendas needed additional structure to enhance collaboration opportunities between hubs, rather than being update focused.

**DLG Summits:**

DLG Summits are a key opportunity to establish the unique ethos culture and approach of DLG; to bring together dance participation professionals of all levels of experience, from different professional contexts, working in different dance styles and from different parts of the region, to contribute on an equal basis.

The 4 Summits have enabled Sub Regional Hubs to connect their emerging networks with the region-wide DLG group and to recruit new participants for their activities. The events have enabled the wider DLG community to participate to the ongoing development of the Project, to share in the learning, to contribute to direction and planning of specific elements and to shape the future vision of DLG.

We have seen a significant growth in Summit attendance since the beginning of this project, reaching 59 attendees by the end of the 2 year period. New attendees were invited by Sub Regional Hub colleagues and so the growth can be directly attributed to project activity.

“This was my first time attending a DLG event and immediately I thought to myself why haven't I been involved before. What a fantastic initiative, a safe and igniting space for regional creatives that are all driven by the same purpose - to see dance thrive - to recognise and realise that in dialogue yesterday was enlightening. My favourite aspect of the day was meeting all the other types of creatives both individual and collective, and understanding how passionate everybody was to make dance better and wider reaching. I enjoyed taking part in discussions with new connections, mostly finding similarities of thought and feeling, and realising how connected I felt. Working in a remote-based role in my day-to-day can feel extremely isolating, demotivating and detaching, yesterday eradicated those tensions and I felt boosted, motivated and inspired to make and take action in my personal and professional circles.”

**Summit Attendee**

“I felt inspired and excited to be part of a dynamic network of professionals working towards making the dance sector dynamic and accessible”

**Summit Attendee**

Different people enjoy different event formats - for example, an estimated 60% of people preferred a more informal arrangement at DanceHub, while 40% enjoyed a formal approach at MAC, which included cabaret seating and a more conference style. Future Summits might shift between the two styles, or attempt to find a mid-point that works successfully.

Feedback has been instrumental to designing Summit schedules. For example:

“Get a guest speaker who is able to create impactful advocacy campaigns, give top tips on how to galvanise our collective for example.”

At the following summit, DLG invited Steve Ball (Birmingham Arts School) & Caroline Miller (BRB) to provide provocations on advocacy & lobbying.

“I find networking very hard, a structured networking like speed dating or question promo cards might help some of us more awkward small talkers.”-

The following Summit included a structured speed dating / networking activity.

Movement activities were effective in re-energising the space, and appealed to a community of dancers and dance professionals to get involved.

**Areas for improvement:**

While the Project funding enabled bursaries to be offered, for the first time in the history of DLG, to freelancers and those with other access requirements, there is still room for development and improvement in removal of barriers to attendance and participation. Microphones, PA and large enough screen to be visible to all in the space are essential and a commitment to BSL interpreters from the outset to enable this provision to be communicated as part of event marketing.

‘It is easy to discuss what \*could\* be done and not enough time working out \*who\* is going to do it.” Summit attendee

With minimal project management infrastructure / capacity post project, it is challenging to ensure that Summit conversation are actioned and communicated.

FABRIC have committed to holding a secretariat role for DLG until 2026, in which time they will be responsible for 2 summits per year, bi-weekly Steering Group meetings with a focus on diversifying the leadership and driving the work forward. There will be a particular focus on bringing in other NPOs to support the ongoing commitment to this work.

**Project Manager role**

Having an independent Project Manager bringing in capacity outside of the freelancers and organisations driving the project. In particular it has allowed progression of leadership for the two Project Managers who had had previous connections to DLG work.

**Aim 2: To diversify the people and voices who lead the work of DLG**

There has been a significant increase in the diversity of people and voices who lead the voice of DLG. This is evident through:

**Sub-Regional Hubs** - leadership is now more dispersed across the region and includes representatives of different cultural dance forms, young people and independents. The Convenors of the 6 Sub-Regional Hubs are invited to attend DLG Steering Group meetings and/or Project Advisory Groups and are consulted about strategic developments and opportunities.

**South Asian Dance Hub** - One of the Hubs was convened by SAMPAD and aimed to bring together practitioners and professionals in the South Asian dance community across the region. This group has been previously under-represented in DLG so it is notable that the Project resulted in increased attendance from this group at the Spring 2024 Summit and sustained engagement from Convenor, Senior Ambassador and Youth Ambassador.

**African Diaspora Dance Hub** - perhaps inspired by the visibility of South Asian Dance practitioners at the Spring 2024 Summit, specialists in African Diaspora dance forms put themselves forward to lead a conversation about representation of these forms in Birmingham and across the region. A decision has been made to support this group as a new Sub-Regional Hub and it is hoped that this responsive approach will continue to inspire new leadership voices to come forwards.

**Project Advisory Group** - includes representatives from different cultural backgrounds, those with lived experience of disability, young people and people at varying levels of careers and organisations (early, mid & established, freelance, small scale organisation & NPO). Funds were made available to support access needs for individuals who identify as disabled.

**Dance in Education Strategy Group** - as well as DLG representatives from subsidised, independent and education sectors across the region, this group included advocacy specialists for dance and performing arts in education, One Dance UK and Steve Ball.

**DLG Summits** - have provided an important platform for this increased diversity of people and voices leading DLG. At the Spring 2024 Summit in particular, updates and inputs were provided by representatives of the 6 Sub-Regional Hubs and members of the Project Advisory Group. The Project offered bursaries to enable freelancers / independents and access support costs for individuals identifying as disabled.

*“It was brilliant how, at the Summit, people were empowered to own the space and what they were passionate about.”* Advisory Group Member

**Learning & Recommendations**

**Sub Regional Hubs**

The Project piloted Sub-Regional Hubs in 5 locations across the West Midlands, plus one that is genre specific. This approach provides a model for extending activity, opportunities to access training/CPD and to collaborate within and across geographical areas. This model has directly strengthened local connections in 5 places over the two years, connecting local organisations and freelancers in advocacy, support and links with like-minded organisations in each place. This has already inspired new potential Hubs and there remains a desire to secure resources to enable extension of activity outside of Birmingham and thereby further diversify the voices that lead DLG.

**South Asian Dance Sub-Regional Hub**

This hub was key in facilitating the connection to the community of South Asian Dance artists, who have been previously under-represented within DLG. These include specialists in Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Bhangra, Garba and Bollywood.

The hub began their journey with a consultation period, which identified areas of support needed for the South Asian Dance community, including business development, funding & marketing (a total of 12 people took part). This gave SAMPAD as Convenor a structure through which to deliver the rest of their activity as a hub in direct response to the outcomes of the research.

This is an example of how we have adapted the model in direct consultation with leaders and a way in which we have continued to work via a form specific model in addition to a geographical model.

**DLG Summits**

The Spring 2024 Summit was the most culturally diverse Summit to date with 29% of attendees identifying as being from global majority backgrounds, and we attribute this largely to the success of the South Asian Dance Hub and the SAMPAD team. The open structure of the afternoon programme enabled Sandra Golding to propose a workshop focused on African Diaspora dance forms; this has led to formation of a group with potential to become a new DLG Hub.

**Project Advisory Group - Self Evaluation**

**What went well? Comments in evaluation included:**

* Sustained progress and creating an equal platform for all participants, fostering a collective voice was key to the success of the advisory group.
* This collective action is improving the sector, communities, and audiences.
* The group commented on their own growth and personal connections being created as part of the advisory group, with like-minded people learning from others' perspectives and experiences.
* There is also increased awareness of activities in the dance sector in the Midlands, which has equipt members to feel more prepared to advocate for the region's artists and work.
* Feedback showed that members felt their contributions had been genuinely valued and incorporated, with meetings having a warm atmosphere and a strong sense of regional connection.
* Participation in the Advisory Group has facilitated shared opportunities, networking, collaboration, and idea generation, providing valuable insights into regional work and fostering a supportive network.

*“The Advisory Group is an important and necessary backup to DLGs activities, and provides a place where deeper reflection happens and decisions can be made.”* Advisory Group Member

**What was challenging, and what can be improved?**

* One of the main challenges has been the limited 'discussion time' during meetings, as updates often take precedence, restricting the opportunity for engaging conversations. Initially, there was little time for input, though this has improved over time.
* It has been difficult when members are asked for feedback but do not contribute, and attending meetings regularly has been a challenge due to varying team availability, leading to difficulties in staying updated and connected.
* The number of voices, while positive, also complicates decision-making.
* Limited capacity has made it hard to keep up with actions, and setting a consistent day and time for meetings would help with commitment.
* Additionally, increasing diversity would ensure a broader range of voices is heard. Pre-meeting updates would allow meetings to focus more on discussions, feedback, and actionable steps.

**Dance in Education Strategy Group**

Having a specific group dedicated around the theme worked well for this focused work, however, is was reflected that even within this group there we times when being even more specific would have been welcomed, for example, specific age range (Primary, Secondary, FE/HE).

The main learning was clear that more advocacy needs to be done to prove Dance in Education’s worth, which the group have directly addressed with the production of films utilising the breadth of knowledge across the network. The focus on dissemination of these has been planned in current activity with delivery due to take place from August to December 2024.

**Ideas for Further Development**

As a result of DLG involvement as a partner in Critical Mass 2022 and 2023, DLG has developed relationships with practitioners with lived experience of disability, who are involved in the steering of DLG projects; these representatives have been fundamental to maintaining our goals of accessibility and inclusion at all levels.

These relationships and experience provide a strong foundation for continued development, particularly in engaging with more individuals and groups from global majority background and ensuring that these experiences are represented at leadership / Convenor level. The Project Advisory Group identified the need for identifying gaps and doing more targeting; also for stronger representation of Young People in the leadership and steering of DLG, perhaps by linking up with youth advisory groups/leadership courses/dance ambassadors elsewhere.

The nature of the West Midlands-wide network means flexible working arrangements have to be in place to ensure people are able to connect and collaborate. Online meetings enable participation of more diverse communities across the region but also constrain ease of participation and concentration for some individuals depending on individual access needs. Resources are needed to enable a good balance of in person meetings and online to enable a wide variety of voices to contribute.

DLG might also consider taking a more visible approach to broadening the voices leading the work, by showing support through various pledges and policies, including the More than a Moment pledge and Equality & Diversity policies.

**Aim 3: To support growth in the dance sector and new business models**

Growth in the dance sector and new business models has been addressed through the following activities:

**How to Survive and Thrive in Dance and Dance Participation - Research into Successful Business Models**

Oliver Scott (Mercurial Dance) was commissioned to research and gather inspiring case studies of a range of dance organisations and how they successfully run their respective businesses. This research responds directly to the needs of the DLG, providing reassurance for artists and independents in their own business models, and offering alternative methods of working, making money, and approaching sustainability in their work in the dance sector. This research was then offered as a CPD at both the Autumn 23 Summit, and as part of the Learning & Skills programme in January 2024.

Although this research has been made available via the DLG website, we have been unable to track its usage and therefore measure its impact so far.

**Dance in Education Strategy Group**

*‘A key issue identified by DLG is engaging young people not currently involved in dance, through schools. A working group will map innovative and successful practice; identify gaps and where existing provision will be enhanced by joint working; and develop an ambitious partnership proposal for developing sustainable approach to dance in schools.’* (written in proposal)

A working group was established, bringing together DLG representatives from across the region, together with advocacy specialists from dance and performing arts:

Alison Haynes - Independent

Anna Belyavin - Shropshire Inclusive Dance

Becky Bailey - FABRIC

Chris Radford & Sara Macqueen - Linden Dance Company

Emma Morgan - Independent

Katy Sterran - Flexus Dance Collective

Marcia Edwards & Fleur Hall- ME Dance

Mark Anderson- Infuse Dance

Ogechi Ochiagha - Independent Dance Artist

Paul Golz - University of Worcester

Rebecca Brookes - Birmingham Royal Ballet

Sam Lane - OneDanceUK

Steve Ball - Birmingham Arts School

The working group has gone above and beyond its initial focus, which was to:

* Map existing models of innovative and successful practice
* Identify gaps and opportunities for joint working
* Develop an ambitious partnership proposal for developing sustainable approaches to dance in education, ensuring proposal embeds high quality inclusive practice across the region
* Identify suitable funding streams to support delivery of project proposal, and collaborate with DLG steering group to make a formal application. (It is not the responsibility of the strategy group to deliver the proposal, only to formulate it).
* Advocacy of what dance in education means to both schools and supporting the workforce.

The group made a decision to focus on advocacy and was able to source additional funding to enable the production of a series of 4 advocacy films for Dance in Education. Each of these films is targeted towards a different audience:

Young People

Parents

Headteachers & Governors

Government & Policy Makers

This suite of films will provide focus for a Dance in Education campaign to be launched Summer 2024 and rolled out Autumn 2024, in collaboration with One Dance UK and DLG leaders from across the region. The campaign will be supported by a dedicated communications specialist building bespoke campaigns for each of the target audiences.

**Advocacy as part of Business Development**

Responding to priorities identified at the Autumn Summit 2023, a decision was made to focus on *Advocacy and Lobbying: how can we work together to amplify the story and impact of what we do?* At Spring 2024 Summit.

Steve Ball (Birmingham Arts School and formerly Director of Community & Education at Birmingham REP) and Name (Birmingham Royal Ballet), shared their expertise in advocacy and lobbying then joined group discussions.

This session received very favourable feedback from Summit attendees and will help to create the conditions for the Dance in Education campaign later in 2024 as well as build confidence and understanding for DLG members in the importance and potential benefits of engaging proactively with policy makers / influencers in their area, regionally and nationally.

Steve Ball offered to lead a follow up CPD session including role play to support DLG members to engage with policy makers and local government representatives in their area. This took place on 5 June and was attended by 8 people.

**Learning and Recommendations**

***Questions & Reflections raised by the Project Advisory Group***

* What’s the legacy of Oliver’s Survive & Thrive Research work? What more can be done to maximise impact of this work?
* How are we supporting emerging artists or small-scale social enterprises to

understand how to do things e.g. register as a CIC, get insurance, apply for

funding? Business focus is important for sustainability and longevity, but if

you don’t know where to start, it’s overwhelming and unobtainable.Can we use Oliver’s research project to inform what’s needed?

* We need to understand more qualitative case studies to know how and where

growth is happening.

* Could we go back to the peer to peer working that DLG began with? Experiential Learning Exchange Sequence
* Loving the Instagram and Facebook pages and the increased sense of connectivity. Could we have a story highlight per month in case people miss the one day of sharing specific opportunities?

**Aim 4: To enhance talent retention and development opportunities**

**Youth Ambassadors**

Each sub-regional hub team included a dedicated Youth Ambassador role. This offered a unique opportunity for emerging professionals to gain an overview of the region wide dance community, developing industry connections and insights to grow their career as dance professionals.

As part of this offer, Youth Ambassadors were also offered a unique mentoring opportunity bespoke to their own needs. This was 20 hours worth of mentoring with professionals from across the sector, to further the transition into professional practice:

* Lexy Garner- Mentored by Alleyne Dance
* Amber Cahill- Mentored by Linden Dance Company
* Ben Randall - Mentored by Deaf Explorer
* Amy Harrison- Mentored by Rhiannon Faith Company
* Heidi Thomas- Mentored by Claire Pring & Melanie Knott
* Simran Sheemar- Mentored by Spectra & Amy Dalton-Hardy

*“Having the freedom to choose who that mentor was enabled me to excel my development in a specific area and connect with them in my own time beyond the core project events. My mentor, Sadé of Alleyne Dance, and I met for 10-sessions and explored topics relevant to the present, ranging from kickstarting my dance career as a freelancer, choreography & performance and how to manage challenges along the way. At the time, it was exactly what I needed, and the support was unrivalled. I appreciated being able to work through transitional moments with someone who understands the ins and outs and can offer guidance/confidence. I learnt to take a jump into a new challenge when the timing wasn’t right, and regularly look back at our meeting notes for guidance and reassurance.”*

* **Lexy Garner, Youth Ambassador for Coventry & Warwickshire**

*“Some of the sessions we had over zoom and we spoke about how to be a successful self employed dance teacher/company. We shared screens and I was shown the best way to keep organised using excel. This was really helpful and would have loved more of this.*

*I visited Linden dance during the Monday sessions and observed how they teach. This was great and I got to see who linden were and what sort of performances they created as they had a few performances lined up so the company was rehearsing for this.*

*I observed some of the school sessions, where they taught year 7, year 8 and 9 at 2 different schools.*

*Mentoring sessions really helped me with my confidence and helped me understand more about the world of how to run a dance company.*

*I really wished we both had more time as we were really busy and struggled to fit the mentoring sometimes and there was more funding for mentoring as I found this really beneficial for me.”*

* **Amber Cahill, Youth Ambassador for Worcestershire & Herefordshire**

The Brewhouse Arts Centre also piloted a similar Emerging Leaders Programme, as part of the Burton & East Staffordshire sub-regional hub, which put additional young people at the centre of the sector to take part in shadowing and 1:1 mentoring opportunities with industry professionals.

**Learning & Skills**

The Learning & Skills programme offered the DLG network free CPD from September 2023 until June 2024.

**Facts & Figures:**

18 CPD sessions (24, including the Motionhouse series)

8 in person

10 Online

4 Masterclasses

Accessed by 93 people

Overall attendee average (per session): 9 attendees

In person average: 9.7 attendees

Online average: 8.5 attendees

Masterclass average: 12 attendees

Feedback from participants emphasised the excellent variety and balance of offerings, catering to diverse interests and needs within the community. Attendees appreciated the wide range of session focuses, from reinforcing established practices to introducing innovative ideas and methodologies. Learning opportunities extended beyond dance techniques, with valuable insights gained from different creatives and service providers. The accessibility of sessions, both in terms of their free nature and online accessibility, was highly praised. The session leads were specialists in their fields, and also representative of the DLG network itself, with DLG community sharing their practice with each other.

DLG excels in collaborating directly with the network to provide relevant opportunities.

This program was co-curated with DLG members through a series of consultation exercises:

* Spring Summit 2023- CPD ideas gathered on post-it notes and collated
* Summer/Autumn 2023- proposed session focuses sent out via google form for the network to choose which should be prioritised.

DLG also responded to numerous direct session asks over the course of the project. These included Starting Your Anti-racism Journey (Led by Louise Katerega & Anthony Ekundayo Lennon), Dance Photography and Film (led by InfuseDANCE) and Advocacy and lobbying (led by Steve Ball).

**Learning & Recommendations**

DLG is an excellent way for emerging professionals to access the sector. The network has numerous role models who could be used as case studies to demonstrate their journey alongside DLG such as Lexy Garner, Katie Holtom and Natalie Haslam, all who took part in previous projects (#DanceConnect & Beyond Borders) and are now professionals in their own right, contributing to the current project as Senior and Youth Ambassadors, and Project Manager. DLG should consider creating a series of case studies to showcase this as well as tracking the impact of these Ambassador experiences for the individuals involved.

The Project enabled contribution to travel costs for freelancers attending the Summits, this was the first time this has been possible and significantly increased accessibility of the events. How will DLG continue to fund this support once the Project is complete?

CPD has been taking place continuously over the course of the project. This has included the formal learning & skills strand, as well as hub activity providing workshops to professionals and also reaching schools and community groups. The Learning & Skills programme ensured there were development opportunities connected to DLG’s wider aims e.g. business development, inclusive working, digital, diversity. How to build on and grow this strategic, responsive support for talent retention and development, outside of the context of a funded project?

There is an opportunity to reach even further with opportunities such as mentoring and shadowing, when we consider the breadth of organisations and freelancers who are members of the DLG network. There is potential for a more joined up approach to talent development, with a structure that DLG could learn from the Brewhouse Emerging Leaders Programme.

**Learning & Skills**

\*Attendance

As this was a free offer, attendance was inconsistent. This was due to several reasons:

* Receiving other (paid) work
* Time of workshop
* Miscommunication with booking
* Location of in person events

A more efficient booking system & confirmation process is needed in future to ensure participants are kept fully up to date and reminded of their booking to encourage a higher attendance at events.

Advertising was generally reliant on direct communication via email and e-newsletter subscribers, and there is room for additional marketing to be in place.

Social media channels were only created 29th January 2024, and 13 of the 18 sessions had already taken place by this point. It would have been beneficial to have these platforms in place earlier. More support was also needed from DLG stakeholders to include the opportunities on their own websites and newsletters, including the steering group and advisory group. It might be worth considering the possibility of each organisation (or NPO) providing time in-kind from their marketing team to support the ongoing presence of DLG and its activities if there is no longer a project manager in place to monitor this.

Members of disabled communities would also feel more comfortable to attend if DLG used more inclusive advertising such as BSL interpretation videos and Plain Text documents.

Although over half the activities took place online, in person activities were sometimes difficult for people to access depending on the specific location. Budget constraints meant that often sessions relied on where free space was available, which often means activity was in central Birmingham. Future CPD programmes should factor room hire into their budgets.

Online CPD sessions have been recorded and are available on the DLG YouTube channel, however these have not been heavily used, with a total of only 28 views across 5 videos. DLG must continue to offer this as an option regardless of take up.

**Aim 5: To build digital opportunities to innovate and build new audiences for dance, especially young people.**

Work has focused on building digital resources, profile and connectivity that enable the sub regional hubs to share opportunities across the wider DLG community. By diversifying the voices in DLG, and increasing visibility of performances, events, learning opportunities, we have opened the door to new audiences within and across the region. Innovations and activity included :

**Branding**

After a thorough recruitment process, INSIGHT branding consultancy agency we commissioned to develop the digital resource kit. This kit includes logos, brand identity and a toolkit to help DLG members feel part of a unified community.

**Website- www.danceleadersgroup.co.uk**

A new DLG website, hosted on Wix, has supported Sub Regional Hub teams to communicate what DLG is and to engage new participants in their respective areas, thus increasing the reach and visibility of the group. It also has a place for bookings (Summit & CPD), and news/ updates.

So far, 66% of visitors are new and 34% of visitors are returning. The most popular page visitors navigate to is Learning & Skills. It seems that people use the website more for booking than for finding out information.

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**Instagram - @danceleadersgroup**

The DLG hosts an instagram account to share opportunities, news and updates directly to our network. This was created on 29th January 2024 to bridge the communication gap in between Summits, and for those who did not regularly connect to DLG via direct email. It enables more effective marketing of CPD and Summits.

* 287 Followers / 362 followers as of Aug 24
* 387 accounts reached
* 150 accounts engaged
* Top age range: 25-34 (39.5%)
* Top location : Birmingham (14.6%)
* 84.1% Women / 15.8% Men
* Highest growth point directly after the Spring Summit- followers rose by 22
* Top post 19th April celebrating Spring summit
* Engagement is highest with posts, rather than stories.

**Facebook- www.facebook.com/groups/danceleadersgroup**

Responding to proposals at Autumn Summit 2023, DLG now hosts a private Facebook group for members to post their own opportunities and news directly to the network. This is a method requiring little to no management, and allows connectivity to be maintained even if DLG itself has no activity. Created on 20th November 2023, it now has 103 members, with the highest growth occurring after the Spring Summit 2024.

**Learning & Skills Development / CPD**

10/18 (55%) of Learning & Skills sessions took place online thus allowing a wider range of practitioners at all levels of experience to engage with DLG and develop their practice; sessions were recorded and have been made available online. This is a new approach to skills development and learning can inform future online CPD.

**Dance in Education advocacy films**

The launch of these four films, each targeting a different audience (Policy Makers, Headteachers, Parents/Carers and Young People), will provide a focus for continued joined up digital activity and support DLG community to build digital audiences.

**Diversifying DLG**

***“****By diversifying the voices in DLG, we open the door to new audiences automatically.”* Advisory Group member

**Learning & Recommendations**

The development of visual identity / branding has marked a pivotal change for DLG, allowing the group to be recognisable, unified and celebrated and providing the basis for the creation of an enhanced digital presence, including social media and a website. It was challenging and exciting to work with INSIGHT as an external company, specialising in non profit but relatively new to arts/dance sector. The process they facilitated enabled multiple perspectives to be included in the articulation of DLG vision, mission, values and approach.

The visual identity developed for DLG can be used to brand all future comms and activity, irrespective of which organisation is leading it, supporting the ambition and feeling of a united collaborative democratic network.

There are some questions and challenges for DLG in terms of how to build on this foundation. In particular:

* It is important to establish how DLG digital presence will be maintained when there is no longer a dedicated Project Manager to hold this. Perhaps it is a dedicated Social Media Manager, a commitment from the current project convenor, or a collaboration between members. This also requires a content strategy to be developed.
* Social media is a vital tool for reaching the network and it is a hugely positive development to allow ease of access to opportunities and events
* Insights tell us that people respond better to faces in photos than words, and that engagement with posts is higher when associated with a specific event (e.g. the Summit). As it is a predominantly visual tool, with options to share video and clips, Instagram has proved very effective in reaching the professional dance audience.

DLG should also consider additional platforms such as LinkedIn, which is purpose built for networks.

* The DLG website needs to be optimised for accessibility, including image descriptions and screen readers.
* The project has focused on digital engagement with professionals, to support realisation of the other project aims. It has not developed digital engagement / content specifically for young people. It could be argued that young people use social media the most and therefore are more likely to access the network through these channels (with 32% of users being ages 18-24 according to Instagram); however, the content produced so far has not been targeted directly towards them. There will be an opportunity to target young people directly as part of the Dance in Education Advocacy campaign, which will take place Autumn 2024. This will provide valuable learning for DLG on digital approaches to engage young people in dance; providing data is collected on reach and engagement.
* DLG does not yet have systems in place to share impact data across the network. This has been identified as a key theme for future development, as collating impact data for dance participation across the region will enormously strengthen the case for investment / funding.

**Aim 6: To build on Critical Mass learning around inclusive integrated work; and professional participatory practice development; amplify outcomes and legacy.**

Critical Mass learning around inclusive integrated work has been a central focus across the Project strands:

**Learning & Skills Programme**

7 of the 18 Learning & Skills CPD sessions had a focus on learning around inclusion and accessibility:

* Inclusive & Integrated practice, led by Rachel Liggitt
* Making Work Inclusively, led by Spectra (x2)
* Building Access into budgets, led by Rachael Lines (FRONTLINEdance)
* Terminology when talking about Disability, led by Disability Rights UK
* There’s More Than 1 Way to Be Inclusive- Masterclass, led by Deaf Explorer, Freewheelin’ Dance & Spectra
* Masterclass: How Do You Find Common Ground In Your Inclusive Project? The Common Ground Manual with Zoie Golding MBE and Rachel Liggitt

DLG has also been making an effort to embed inclusive practices throughout the Project e.g. online options, BSL, accessible studio spaces, breakout/ quiet rooms. This has been driven by the learning from Critical Mass

**Sub Regional Hubs**

3 of the 6 sub regional hubs (FRONTline Dance / Stoke-on-Trent & North Staffs; Brewhouse Arts Centre / East Staffs; Black Country Dance Hub) chose to focus on the creative enquiry questions:

* How to embed and develop inclusive and integrated practice across the Midlands?
* How best to amplify the outcomes and build on the legacy of Critical Mass in the Midlands?

*“Many people who are engaged in the current project have the lived experience of Critical Mass, embedding now in practice. Thinking has changed, feeding into what is next, how we are shaping new projects”*

* **Advisory Group meeting 2023**

*“The focus in the Black Country has been to flag up "The Playbook" as an excellent resource for those working in the dance sector and not just large scale projects.*

*We have promoted learning & skills opportunities by FABRIC.*

*We have collected information from attendees on inclusive & integrated practice training requests, identifying best times /days to organise a session to help with future planning.*

*Our meeting attendees were VERY EXCITED about the 2023 Legacy Project”*

* **Maggie Lewis: Black Country Sub-regional Hub Convenor**

**Learning & Recommendations**

*“Critical Mass specific legacy doesn’t feel like it’s been a priority, but inclusion generally as an embedded practice has been.”* Advisory Group member

FABRIC, as the Critical Mass Producer, developed the Common Ground Manual as a way of capturing and sharing the learning from Critical Mass within a dance context. Within the Project, CPD activity has focused on promoting the Common Ground Manual within the Summits and across the Sub-Regional Hubs; and providing a Learning & Skills masterclass. However, unfortunately, this session was not well attended, with only 5 people taking part.

So, whilst the DLG group includes many professionals who were directly involved in Critical Mass and have integrated the work in their practice, there is a reflection that the CPD is potentially reaching the people who already feel like they have these skills. There may need to be further interventions to ensure that legacy of Critical Mass with inclusive and integrated work continues to be relevant and maintained across the DLG as well as a need to advertise to a wider network.

This is being explored as part of planning for future projects. Perhaps, DLG might consider mandatory accessibility training for those leading DLG activities in future.

DLG can always do more for accessibility and inclusion. These have been identified previous in this report, and include:

* Optimising DLG website for accessibility
* Use of BSL at all events and in marketing
* Offering remote joining options to in person events
* Offering all documents as easy read and plain text versions
* Take opportunities out to communities, rather than relying on them coming to DLG

There is a commitment from DLG leadership to ensuring inclusive and integrated practice. This includes modelling inclusive behaviour, and visible endorsement for disabled participants on advisory boards and steering groups.

*“Inclusion is not a choice, it's a must. It shouldn’t be ‘inclusive dance’, it should just be ‘dance’”*

* **Rachael Lines: Stoke & North Staffs Sub-regional Hub Convenor**

**Appendix - Who has been involved**

**DLG & Project Leadership**

The Dance Leaders Group (DLG) is currently convened by **FABRIC** with support from **Birmingham Royal Ballet**. DLG is overseen by a Steering Group comprising: representatives from FABRIC and Birmingham Royal Ballet

Oliver Scott (Mercurial Dance)

independent facilitator Orit Azaz,

**Susan Goodwin** (Arts Connect) -Year 1 only

As part of the Project,the Convenors of the 6 sub regional hubs have also been invited to join and participate in Steering Group meetings:

**Sub Regional Hub Teams:**

**Phase One (Pilot)**

**Coventry and Warwickshire** - Convened by Oliver Scott (Mercurial Dance)

Senior Ambassador Ashley Jordan

Youth Ambassador Lexy Garner

**Black Country** - Convened by Maggie Lewis (Black Country Dance Hub)

Senior Ambassador Jodie Stus

Youth Ambassador Ben Randall

**Hereford and Worcestershire** - Convened by Clare Wood (Dancefest)

Senior Ambassador Clare Wood

Youth Ambassador Amber Cahill

**Phase Two**

**Burton & East Staffordshire** - Convened by Charlie Birtles, Catherine Clissett & Owen Hurcombe (Brewhouse Arts Centre)

Senior Ambassador Natalie Haslam

Youth Ambassador Heidi Thomas

**Stoke on Trent & North Staffordshire** - Convened by Rachael Lines (FRONTLINEdance)

Senior Ambassador Lucie Labadie

Youth Ambassador Amy Harrison

**W Mids South Asian Dance Network** - Convened by Piali Ray / Sabra Khan (SAMPAD)

Senior Ambassador Reena Tailor

Youth Ambassador Simran Sheemar

**Project Management**

A freelance Project Manager was recruited as part of the Project. This role was fulfilled by **Samina Beckford** (Year 1), and **Katie Holtom** (Year 2).

Additional freelance project staff have included:

Natasha Stone - Freelance Marketing Specialist

Ryan Charles - Visual Artist and Film Maker

CPD Leads:

Rachel Liggitt (Shropshire Inclusive Dance)

Kirsten Tranter

Kate DeRight & Hayley Guest (Spectra)

Helen Mason (Freewheelin & Propel Dance)

Rachael Vaezy

Maggie Lewis (Black Country Dance Hub)

Rachael Lines (FRONTLINE dance)

Disability Rights UK

Oliver Scott (Mercurial Dance)

Amy Dalton Hardy

Helga Henry

Vikki Jones (UK New Artists)

Alison Grade (Mission Accomplished)

Natalie Haslam

Lauren Russell (We are Epic / ID Dance)

Lara Coffey (One Dance UK)

Louise Katerega

Anthony Ekundayo

Motionhouse

Zoie Golding

Mark Anderson (INFUSE dance)

Sampad

Ruth Lee

Amber Merrick-Potter

Orit Azaz

Kirsty Hillyer (We Are Frilly)

**Project Advisory Group**

The Project was overseen by a Project Advisory Group comprising independent professionals, representatives from funded organisations and young people (18yrs+) who bring specialist skills and expertise to drive DLG activity. These are:

**Year 1 & 2:**

* Orit Azaz, Freelance
* Birmingham Royal Ballet
* FABRIC
* OneDanceUK
* Delphine Wise, Freelance Dance Artist
* Helen Mason, Freewheelin & Propel Dance Company
* Stephanie Sandy, Freelance Dance Artist & Choreographer
* Kirsten Tranter, Freelance Producer

**Year 1 Only:**

* Susan Goodwin, Arts Connect
* Rob Hemming, Freelance Dance Artist
* Helen Mclaughlin, Freelance Dance Artist
* Stefania Caterinella, Freelance Dance Artist

**Year 2 Only:**

* Ashley Jordan, Ascension Dance
* Maggie Lewis, Black Country Dance Hub
* Clare Wood, Dancefest
* People Dancing
* Ogechi Ochiagha, Freelance Dance Artist

**Dance in Education Strategy Group**

A working group was established, bringing together DLG representatives from across the region, together with advocacy specialists from dance and performing arts:

Alison Haynes - Independent

Anna Belyavin - Shropshire Inclusive Dance

Becky Bailey - FABRIC

Chris Radford & Sara Macqueen - Linden Dance Company

Emma Morgan - Independent

Katy Sterran - Flexus Dance Collective

Marcia Edwards & Fleur Hall- ME Dance

Mark Anderson- Infuse Dance

Ogechi Ochiagha - Independent Dance Artist

Paul Golz - University of Worcester

Rebecca Brookes - Birmingham Royal Ballet

Sam Lane - OneDanceUK

Steve Ball - Birmingham Arts School