

# Too high a cost

The dance industry expected a reduction in funding this year, but the lottery of cuts – some surprisingly substantial – has had a devastating impact on several flagship organisations, reports **Marianka Swain**

“It’s worse than my worst nightmare,” says Betsy Gregory, artistic director of long-standing festival Dance Umbrella, which has had its Arts Council England (ACE) funding reduced by 43 per cent. “We expected a reduction, but, beforehand, the ACE publicly recognised a 15 per cent cut was the tipping point beyond which organisations would be seriously compromised. I thought we might get a 20 per cent cut, as we don’t have a building to maintain, but I never expected this.”

Caroline Miller, director of Dance UK, which champions, among other things, dancers’ health, is similarly baffled as to why the government has completely cut its contribution – “which was about 50 per cent of our base funding” – after praising their vital work. “In our latest survey we found that, every year, 80 per cent of dancers suffer an injury that stops them dancing, resulting in £1 million in treatment costs and another £1 million in



Dance UK members receive Harlequin £30,000 sponsorship towards the first National Institute of Dance Medicine and Science. From left to right: Angela Towler, Camilla Dallerup, Sarah Temlett, Kate Prince and Dr Emma Redding

disruption to the industry. We’ve more than proven our worth, so this is a disappointing response.”

One of the UK’s leading ballet companies also has a challenging future, explains its chief executive Mark Skipper: “Northern Ballet has always been underfunded, given the amount of touring work we do, but we’ve had support from ACE schemes like Sustain and Capital. Next year, we could be looking at a drop in budget from £3.5 million in 2010/11 to £2.5 million in 2012/13. We already improved our business model during the Sustain

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programme, so we’ll now have to make some tough choices.”

For the New Labour-founded Youth Dance England (YDE), a change of government was always going to bring complications, but director Linda Jasper was baffled by the decision to place YDE among contenders for the national portfolio at the last minute: “We were a managed client, so we had funding as a strategic organisation from the ACE and Department of Education. Now, with the shift to a localism agenda, we’ve gone from funding of £2.2 million to £500,000,

only £50,000 of which can be retained by us – the rest goes to the new regional organisations.

“On top of that, dance had funding from the Youth Sport Trust through the PE curriculum, but that’s a victim of cuts as well, so it’s a double whammy for young dancers. We’re hoping we might get support from the ACE strategic funds, but we haven’t had any information yet, so our future is up in the air.”

Caroline shares her frustration: “Dance UK is the only national advocate with connections between all parts of the sector and the medical profession. We’ve had an overwhelmingly positive response, particularly about our long-term projects, such as creating a National Institute of Dance, Medicine and Science. The problem with the lottery of the funding cuts – the surprising decisions this year and the uncertainty of future agendas of this and/or the next government – is that we have to put those plans on hold, or at least reduce them dramatically, unless we can find other means of support.”

Betsy echoes this sentiment: “A cut of this size means drastic changes, not just tinkering around the edges. Dance Umbrella



Betsy Gregory, artistic director of Dance Umbrella

will look and feel different to previous years – there's no escaping that. However, there absolutely will be artistic activity every year going forward, and it's our intention and our mission to continue to nurture artists and make an impact."

**M**ark is determined to maintain Northern Ballet's agenda: "We decided not creating new work wasn't a way forward, so we set up a production fund and raised three-quarters of the money through generous sponsorship and donations for the next three years' worth of new productions. We knew we had to be quick off the mark as everyone's in the same boat. We also agreed to take part in a BBC documentary [which airs in April 2012] – perhaps if people see the reality of running a huge company, it'll encourage them to get involved.

"However, we're currently in a position of having to reduce our 39 company dancers by as many as ten, which would put a devastating strain on those remaining given that we put on roughly 150 performances a year with 25 weeks of touring. So, we've created two new campaigns – Buy Back A Dancer, where you can contribute to the company, and Sponsor A Dancer, where you can support an individual – and we're looking for a new tour sponsor. Both national trusts and our audiences have historically been very generous, helping us fund our new building (we got £30,000 just from bucket collections), and we hope they'll stick by us."

U.Dance England 2010



Photograph © Brian Slater

Linda is grateful the ACE has awarded YDE a £200,000 grant to sustain them until July 2012, but is keen their activities continue long after that. "The reality is you can't become a professional dancer unless you have access to it early in life, so it's our mission to provide dance in a socially inclusive way.

"U.Dance has encouraged so many young people and it's going UK-wide next year, culminating in performances at the Southbank Centre on July 13–16 – it'll be a celebration, but could also be a swansong unless we find more support.

"We're delighted with the success of our other youth

programmes – Young Creative, for choreographers, the National Young Dance Ambassadors scheme and Stride, for areas of dance not involving performing, such as marketing – and our resources for teachers and accreditation partnership with Trinity College London.

"Dance is an unregulated profession and takes place in so many different settings, from schools and youth centres to hospitals and prisons. The government can't expect the new regional organisations to cover all that ground, as well as maintain buildings and focus on professional distribution,

and, unlike music and drama, there's very little dance youth support on a national level."

Caroline notes the industry is constantly changing, so organisations need to respond quickly: "Every day, a new advocacy issue comes up, whether it's about dance A-level being compared unfavourably with other subjects or the change of rules concerning the level of English foreign students need to have, which adversely affects dance vocational courses. Dance UK even secured a parliamentary debate on the place of dance in education on October 11 through the All Party Parliamentary Dance Group.

Northern Ballet's Martha Leebolt and Ashley Dixon in *Beauty and the Beast*

Photograph © Jason Tozer

We have a team of experts who know how to support dancers – it would be a travesty if that experience were wasted. We don't have tickets to sell, so we need other means of support."

Betsy hopes Dance Umbrella's unique platform will always be there, "although it's unlikely we'll ever entirely fill the funding gap. However, we know our festival shines a spotlight on the art form, taking audiences on a journey to broaden and deepen their knowledge of dance, and also gives diverse artists the opportunity to present their work in whatever scale, form and location the piece requires. That exchange

of ideas and constant innovation is what makes dance such a joy."

"There are few winners in this situation," observes Mark. "The ACE set themselves an impossible task when they tried to assess everyone in that timeframe; hopefully, they'll be able to make more informed decisions in the next round of funding in 2015.

"In the meantime, about 80 per cent of the portfolio and many other wonderful organisations have less than they need to do the job the way they want to do it. But we have to help ourselves, be proactive about fundraising and keep producing work that inspires people to support us." ●