

# dance counts report 2022

Commissioned by Dance Ireland in collaboration with  
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**dance counts** moving forward  
together

# INTRODUCTION

This report brings together key findings from two major all-island research projects seeking to understand the working conditions and experiences of dance practitioners on the island of Ireland: the **Dance Counts** survey and the **Dance Conversations** study.

The Dance Counts survey sought to capture data regarding the living and working conditions of those working in, with and for dance. Led by Dance Ireland, the survey was developed in collaboration with Dr Peter Campbell (University of Liverpool) with the support of Dr Victoria Durrer (University College Dublin, UCD).

Led by Dr Aoife McGrath (Queen's University Belfast) and Dr Victoria Durrer (UCD) in collaboration with Dance Ireland and Theatre and Dance NI, **Dance Conversations** was a mixed methods dance, film and discussion-based research project undertaken with six dance artists from both sides of the border. **Dance Conversations** addressed a need, articulated by professional dance artists at the **Co-Motion** Dance Conference in October 2019 and in the March 2021 industry-led *Dance Think Tanks Report*, for collaborative development of North/South creative exchanges and better understanding of the shared living and working conditions of dance artists across the island of Ireland.

In **Dance Conversations**, six dance artists came together in three pairs (with one artist based in Northern Ireland paired with one based in the Republic of Ireland) to explore their working experiences through a process of filmed choreographic exchange and discussion.

Two focus group discussions were also held, through which other dance practitioners' responses to an early draft of the film were gathered to elicit further experiences of working in dance.

Taking place in 2021, the project was supported by the Department for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media under the Cooperation with Northern Ireland Funding Scheme. Alongside initial findings of the **Dance Counts** survey, these **Dance Conversations** were presented and shared to a public audience through a documentary film, co-directed by Mary Wycherley and Aoife McGrath and with an original score by Jürgen Simpson, at an online event on 5th November 2021.

By bringing these two studies together, this report places an embodied experience of work in dance into dialogue with more traditional methods of sociological enquiry.

Findings from both studies are publicly available in the **Dance Counts** online archive and are further disseminated through a series of academic papers and both academic and sector-facing conferences and gatherings. More information regarding access to this work is available in the online archive.

The remainder of the introduction outlines the research context from which our approach to these studies stems, our methodological approach, and information regarding those who took part in both studies. The report is divided into four sections:

**Section 1** explores the **Costs of Dance**, including conditions of income and the financing of dance as well as working processes and indications pointing to the profession's condition of multi-jobbing.

**Section 2** examines the **Spaces for Dance**, including where individuals access dance work, the quality and experience of those sites, and the importance of space for dancing with others.

**Section 3** gives regard to **Wellbeing and Caring**, considering areas such as work-life balance, physical wellbeing and the impact of juggling caring responsibilities and work in dance.

**Section 4** considers responses regarding the availability and scope of **Education and Training** on the island.

Each section gives consideration to the conditions of the pandemic, as appropriate, and unless otherwise stated, all discussions in the report are reflective of the all-island participant group for each study.

## Research Context

Both the **Dance Counts** survey and **Dance Conversations** emerged out of a strategic effort on the part of Dance Ireland, in partnership with researchers and other support organisations, such as Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland, to build the knowledge-base on the conditions and developmental needs of dance across the island of Ireland.

The impetus for the 2021 **Dance Counts** survey emerged from previous membership surveys of the same name conducted by Dance Ireland in 2008, 2010 and 2012. Questions and scope for the 2021 survey were expanded based on learning gained since the previous surveys and through two previous all-island dance research projects, from which the **Dance Conversations** study also builds. These projects were the inaugural all-island dance industry and research conference, Co-Motion: Dance and Borders (2019), and the Dance Think Tanks conversations and report (2020-2021).

The **Co-Motion** conference was the first all-island dance industry and research conference on the island of Ireland and a cross-border, collaborative initiative led by Dance Ireland and Dance Resource Base (now incorporated within Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland) in partnership with Belfast International Arts Festival and Queen's University Belfast, and with additional funding support from An Chomhairle Ealaíon (Arts Council of Ireland), Dublin City Council, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council, Halifax Foundation and Visit Belfast.

The conference was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at the Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast, and curated by Dr Aoife McGrath to address the theme of dance and borders. This theme responded to the impending withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit) and brought together dance practitioners, educators, researchers, producers, policy makers, industry professionals and supporters from across the island and internationally with the aim of strengthening cross-border dance networks between the two jurisdictions and establishing an inclusive and generative platform for artistic exchange and dialogue.

Contributors and participants responded to conference questions about what hinders or facilitates connections across borders through keynote talks, group workshops, paper panels, roundtable discussions and danced presentations (artist spotlights).

A feedback survey of delegates conducted by Dance Resource Base (with 37 completed responses from 84 attendees) evidenced a strong desire to continue building on the conversations generated at this gathering and to strengthen opportunities for cross-border networks, partnerships, and collaborations.

The **Dance Think Tanks** initiative was collaboratively led by Dance Ireland, Dance Limerick, and Dublin Dance Festival in response to immediate challenges faced by the dance sector with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in response to ongoing issues pertaining to the sector's growth and sustainability more broadly.

A series of conversations (facilitated and reported on by Dr Aoife McGrath) were conducted during July 2020 with 29 dance artists and professionals from across the island of Ireland representing a broad range of voices within the dance sector.

Three main themes were explored across three sessions:

- **Making Dance Performance** (discussing challenges faced by artists in making work)
- **The Dance of Interdependence** (considering the overall dance ecology nationally and internationally)
- **Shaping Sustainability** (exploring how to build resilience as a sector and be equipped for the future).

The report identified key areas for development in the sector (e.g., dance education; funding equity; international networking; cross-border connections; artist wellbeing and career support; equality and diversity) and drew attention to a lack of visibility of dance across all areas of cultural life on the island.

## Methodology and Respondent Profile

In bringing together findings from the **Dance Counts** survey and **Dance Conversations**, this report continues the work of mixing dance practice-as-research and social scientific research methods begun in 2019 as part of our collaborative engagement with the **Co-Motion** conference.

Across the two days of the conference, we piloted the **Dance and Borders** study, which asked delegates to answer questions regarding their experiences of borders through both improvised dance responses (McGrath) and responses to a paper survey (Durrer and Campbell).

Results from these two modes of response were then analysed in tandem [[Performance Research paper](#)]. Findings from this initial experiment with a mixed methods approach to data collection evidenced both the potential benefits and the challenges inherent in the

inclusion of artists' embodied responses to research questions about their living and working conditions.

The **Dance Conversations** study and the **Dance Counts** survey presented an opportunity to continue developing this mixed methods approach, as outlined below.

# Development of Methodology

## Dance Conversations

**Dance Conversations** continued experimenting with this interdisciplinary, mixed methods dance, film, and sociological research.

It responded to dance artists' call in the previous research projects for collaborative development of North/South creative exchanges in a post-conflict and post-Brexit landscape, and better understanding of living and working conditions of dance artists across the island.

Three pairs of dance artists (each comprising one dancer from Northern Ireland and one from the Republic of Ireland) engaged in a choreographic exchange, self-filming danced responses to research questions, and sharing these recordings and reflections from their experience of the creative process with their cross-border partners in Zoom conversations.

Recordings of these danced responses and conversations were then edited to create a documentary screendance work, *Dance Conversations* (2021), co-directed by Mary Wycherley and Aoife McGrath and with an original score by Jürgen Simpson, which was screened publicly on 5th November 2021.

In developing the research questions that the artists would film dance responses to, the findings from both the Dance and Borders pilot study at the **Co-Motion** conference and the **Dance Think Tanks Report** were consulted.

Major themes and areas of interest in the context of cross-border exchange were then mapped onto those questions that were also of importance for the 2021 **Dance Counts** survey.

This process resulted in the following questions that functioned as choreographic prompts for the artists and as a framing structure for their conversations:

### Where do I work?

Connecting with wider research questions related to: location (e.g. rural/urban); support infrastructure (or lack thereof); suitable space for dance; precarity; work/life balance; networks and touring; and dance ecologies.

## How do I work?

Connecting with wider research questions related to: professional development/training needs; process (time, or lack thereof, for this); labour supporting dance practice (e.g., other jobs); juggling caring responsibilities; and artist wellbeing.

## What borders do I meet in my work?

Connecting with wider research questions related to: territorial borders (e.g. migration for dance education/training/jobs); border crossing and an all-island dance ecology; and broader issues pertaining to borders and barriers experienced by dance artists on the island of Ireland (e.g. financial support; diversity/inclusion; genre-specific barriers; relationships/networks; and education/development access).

In addition to the paired dance responses and discussions, all pairs were invited to come together on 22 September 2021 for a screening of a first draft of the film, **Dance Conversations**.

This process provided an opportunity for the researchers to pilot their broader public focus group method as well as give space to the paired dancers to reflect together on the approach and the data captured. After viewing the film on their own, through password-protected Vimeo platform-web link, the dance artists were given time to reflect on their own experiences of the film through written responses to the following questions made available on a Google Form:

What did you see in this film?  
What did you think in response to this film?  
What did you feel when watching this film?

After completing this Form, individuals came back together in the Zoom meeting, and shared some of their responses to those questions and the overall experience of the approach through group discussion.

Finally, this reflective process was repeated through further focus group study.

An open call invited dance artists working on the island of Ireland to take part in one of two online Zoom focus group sessions (on 24 September 2021, 3 – 5pm or 25 September 2021, 11am – 1pm). In addition to providing responses to the experience of an advance screening of the **Dance Conversations** film (as detailed above), participants also responded through group discussion to the following questions:

How does this film relate to your dance practice?  
How does this film not relate to your dance practice?  
How do you think this film might be useful?  
How do you think this film might not be useful?  
Anything else you'd like to share?

## Dance Counts Survey

The survey was initially circulated to 198 Dance Ireland members and 236 Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland (TDNI) Members through e-mail communications between August and September, and was followed up with regular posts on social media (Twitter, Facebook).

It was also circulated through Dance Ireland's general e-mailing lists which has further reach (there are approximately 1,100 active accounts in Dance Ireland the list). In order for the survey to reach beyond the memberships of Dance Ireland and Theatre and Dance Northern Ireland, it was also circulated through the communications channels of other resource organisations and dance companies working across the island, including:

Dance Limerick; Dublin Dance Festival; Galway Dance Project; Firkin Crane; Irish World Academy of Music and Dance; Irish Theatre Forum; Dublin Fringe Festival; Dublin Theatre Festival; Dance World; Dylan Quinn Dance Company; Ballet Ireland; Equity – NI National and Branch Committees; Liz Roche Company; United Fall Dance Company; Irish Modern Dance Theatre; DU Dance; NOISEmoves Festival; Dublin Youth Dance Company; Irish National Youth Ballet; and Laois Dance Platform.

## Sample Size and Demographic Profile of Respondents

There were 139 respondents to the [2021 Dance Counts survey](#). 129 respondents were based on the island of Ireland. Of these, 22 were based in Northern Ireland. The figures below indicate the demographic profile of respondents:

- 58% of respondents were aged between 25 and 44
- 80% were female, and 96% agreed that the gender they identify with is the same as their sex as registered at birth
- 73% were straight/heterosexual
- 32% were single, and a further 32% married
- 85% reported no long-term illness, health problem or disability
- 60% reported no caring responsibilities
- 59% selected 'White: Irish' as their ethnic group/background (some selected this in addition to other categories, but for most this was an exclusive choice). 79% of respondents were Irish, Northern Irish or British.



- 93% were usually resident on the island of Ireland, with 43% reporting living in an urban area and Dublin being the most common location (35% of residents)
- 54% had formal educational qualifications to postgraduate level

Further, 67% of survey respondents were members of Dance Ireland, most with Professional membership. 14% of respondents were members of Theatre and Dance NI, most with Individual membership. Half of respondents also reported being a member of another professional body, with over 30 separate bodies mentioned, the most common being:

- Irish Street Arts, Circus & Spectacle Network
- Theatre Forum
- Equity/Equity UK
- Royal Academy of Dance
- Teaching Council of Ireland

The six dancers involved in **Dance Conversations** were recruited through an open call that asked artists to provide a statement expressing their interest in the project and why it might benefit their career. Pairs were formed between the selected artists based on factors such as geographic location (North/South; rural/urban), commensurate career stage (0-5yrs; 5-10yrs; more than 10yrs) and degree of cross-border experience in their work practices on the island of Ireland.

The demographic profile of the **Dance Conversations** participants was not specifically captured. The artists were normally resident in Belfast (x2), Clare (x1), Derry (x1), Dublin (x1), and Limerick (x1). All artists were working primarily in the genre of contemporary dance, with 5 artists working freelance, and one artist working within a company structure.

In addition to the paired dancers who took part in the cross-border choreographic exchange, participants in the **Dance Conversations** project also include individuals who responded to a public call to attend the online focus groups detailed above. Across the two days, six additional dance artists, three based in Northern Ireland and three based in the Republic of Ireland took part. Participants' experience represented the following, which assisted with providing greater insight of diversity of experience of dance as a shared practice on the island. These participants included:

- those born on the island of Ireland
- members of the global majority
- experienced dance artists
- those new to the profession
- male and female

The inclusion of male participants in the focus groups for the **Dance Conversations** study was particularly important due to the film only including responses from female dance artists (almost 90% of respondents to the open call were female). We also see this gender dynamic in the number of female respondents to the **Dance Counts** survey (80%).

We cannot conclude that the responses to either the **Dance Counts** survey or **Dance Conversations** are fully representative of the views or experiences of *all* those working in dance across the island of Ireland (as no comprehensive source exists enumerating all people in this category which could be used as a point of comparison). However, we can nevertheless establish the range of voices included in these pieces of research, and the approaches used to ensure each piece of research was as open to potential respondents as possible.

## A note on Mixed Methods in Dance and Social Science

As researchers working across dance, sociology and cultural policy, we have shared interests in understanding how people encounter and experience cultural work and the policies that frame and/or support that work. Cultural, and in this case, arts policymaking and research tends to examine policy at and across territorial and political scales: international, national, and local. It also analyses specific professional or artform cultures and occupational dynamics. Yet, much of this work neglects the embodied knowledge of artists themselves.

**Mixing dance and sociological research methods lends visibility to dancers' embodied knowledge as an equal source of knowledge to other means of data collection, such as surveys, interviews and focus groups.**

Doing so reorientates research from producing data and knowledge about a cultural form from an outside-observer position, to incorporating knowledge from within the embodied perspective and experience of the artform itself. It affords a fuller account of personally felt experiences of work and how these relate to, clash with, and/or impact on personal, familial and social relations, and the personal and collective experience and understanding of a profession.

**This diversity of data, we argue, helps to broaden our appreciation for the complexity required for ethical policy making that supports the value and sustainability of artists' work.**

In the following report sections, quotes are included from both **Dance Counts** survey responses and **Dance Conversations** spoken and danced responses. Movement descriptions from artists' danced responses to the **Dance Conversations** research questions are in italics. Where sections of these danced responses are available to view in the final version of the *Dance Conversations* (2021) film, a time marker for the start of the clip is provided. The film can be viewed on the [Dance Ireland website here](#).

# 1.Costs of Dance

“As a dance artist I feel that I have multiple identities. You have to be so many different things in so many different contexts with different people. [...] You’re freelance at the end of the day, and it can get exhausting. You want to bring your whole self to all of those things.” (Dance Conversations)

A common theme across both the **Dance Counts** survey and **Dance Conversations** was the ‘costs’ of dance. The precarious nature of working in dance and the necessary reliance on multiple jobs indicates that respondents spend much time sourcing income, often (as made particularly evident by responses in the Dance Conversations study) at the expense of time for professional development and creative process (see also the Wellbeing and Caring section).

This section addresses both some of the numerically measurable costs of dance, and the more intangible, “hidden” costs of dance experienced by those working in the sector. In the following, we highlight issues related to funding, income and precarity, time (or lack thereof) for process, and multi-jobbing.

## Funding

The **Dance Counts** survey provides insight into funding patterns and sources for dance across the island. 67% of respondents had received funding to support their work in the past five years. The most common funding sources were Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and local government sources, as shown in Figure 1:

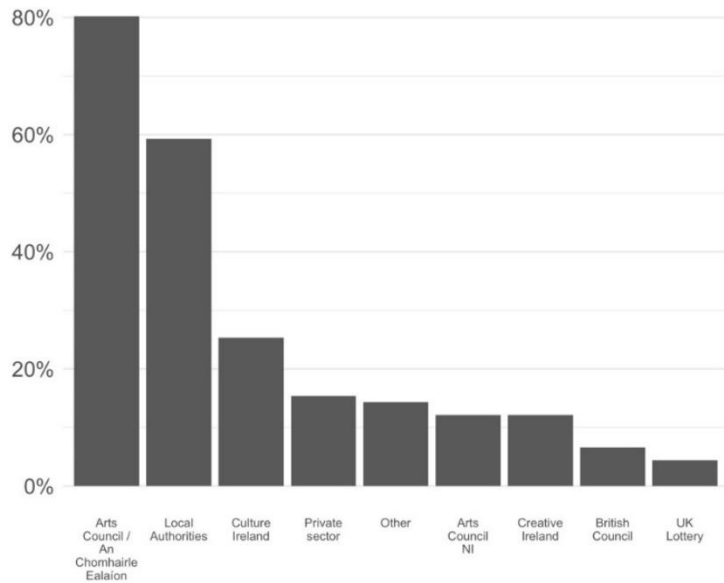


Figure 1: ‘Which sources have funded your work?’

Patterns of funding, in part, reflected patterns of residence, with respondents mostly having received local government funding from areas in which they are resident (with Dublin thus being the most commonly mentioned local funding source), around half of respondents based in Northern Ireland having been in receipt of ACNI funding, and a similar proportion of respondents based in the Republic in receipt of funds from the Arts Council of Ireland.

Particular schemes commonly mentioned from the latter included Agility, Artist In Residence, Dance Bursaries, Professional Development, and Project Funding.

The **Dance Conversations** study provided insight into the impact of funding cycles on work patterns for artists across the island:

*“There’s a lot of waiting in our career. We’re waiting to hear, did we get this, are we doing this, when’s it coming?”.*

*A dancer’s movement pauses and she stands with her head tipped back, eyes focussed on something above her and beyond the camera’s frame. She stands still, suspended by her gaze, waiting. [11.23]*

Discussions between artists in **Dance Conversations** also raised the issue of the discrepancy in funding opportunities for dance artists North and South, with these being significantly more limited in Northern Ireland:

“In the North for individual artists you can only get up to three grand [£3,000] for a project. That’s not going to sustain you in terms of a serious career. You have to be doing loads of other things. There’s a problem there, and that could be further fleshed out in terms of the difference North and South”

“We have an Arts Council of Northern Ireland but like, we’d be so jealous of the Arts Council Ireland because there’s so much more support for individual artists. Here, you can apply once a year for a SIAP [...] It used to be £1,500, but we were fighting saying, how is that supposed to sustain an artist in any project? So, they upped it [...], but even still, it really pales in comparison with Arts Council of Ireland.” (The upper limit for the Arts Council of Ireland Dance Project Award for an Individual Artist is currently 100,000 Euro.)

The respondents in **Dance Conversations** discussed ways of sharing and pooling knowledge about funding schemes and support opportunities open to applicants in both jurisdictions, and how greater knowledge of such schemes would help build connections for cross-border collaboration and open up further opportunities for dance artists in the North to support the creation of work.

## Income and Precarity

The **Dance Counts** survey provides data about the levels of precarity experienced in the sector. Most survey respondents (67%) reported working predominantly on a freelance basis, as shown in Figure 2:

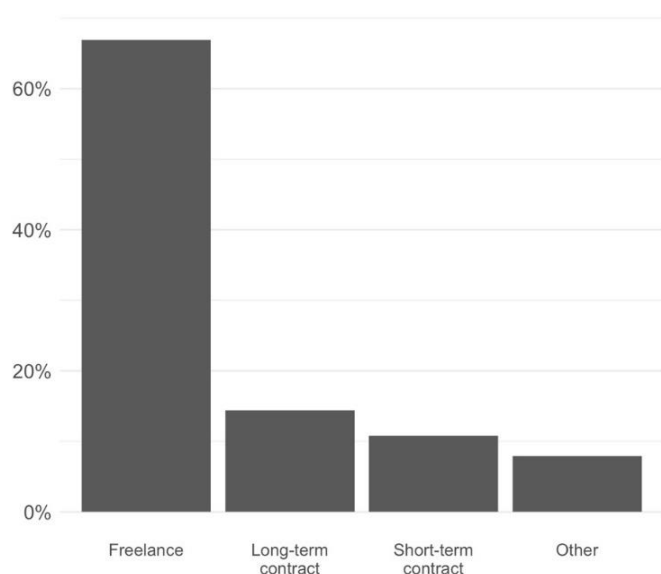


Figure 2: ‘[On what basis] is your work related to dance mostly carried out?’

In addition, 57% of respondents reported that a majority (but not necessarily *all*) of their total income comes from work relating to dance, however 18% reported that a majority of the work they do relating to dance was unpaid.

Unpaid work was less likely to be reported by respondents in their 40s and 50s. 66% of respondents had made social insurance contributions (PRSI/NI) since 2020. 59% of respondents reported a total annual personal income of under €20,000; 60% reported a total annual household income of under €40,000. 68% of respondents do not have a pension, and this was somewhat more likely to be the case for younger than older respondents.

54% of **Dance Counts** survey respondents agreed with the statement 'The income I receive for my work in dance allows me to support myself', but only 30% agreed that their income was stable, with agreement rates being higher amongst respondents based in Northern Ireland than in the Republic.

Most (56%) reported having to subsidise dance income with other sources, with agreement rates being lower amongst respondents based in Northern Ireland, and 39% identified the income of other household members as being important to support their dance work.

The **Dance Counts** survey shows that 32% of respondents had been registered as unemployed in the last five years, and most (55%) had received covid-related financial support, with the Pandemic Unemployment Payment being most commonly mentioned. 41% have received a social welfare payment since 2020.

The impact of the new Basic Income Scheme for Artists launched by the Irish Government in 2022 remains to be seen.

As noted in the **Think Tanks Report** (McGrath, 2021), for some freelance dance artists, receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment represented the first time that they had experienced financial security in their dance career.

For one **Dance Conversations** respondent, not being able to continue with dance performance activities due to Covid restrictions meant taking on regular, part-time employment in community dance. Hired as an employee rather than being self-employed, this respondent spoke of the novelty of being able to take annual leave, saying,

“it’s been great to have a stable income”.

For another **Dance Conversations** respondent, the housing crisis in Ireland has meant that she can no longer afford to sustain a dance career and her family in Ireland.

In the **Dance Counts** survey, when asked the longest period they had gone without paid work in dance, responses fell into these categories:

- 3 months or less – 41%
- 4 - 17 months – 28%
- More than 18 months – 31%

Some open comments in the **Dance Counts** survey noted that whilst work may be consistently paid, this does not necessarily mean that paid work is consistent, and many noted the specific role COVID-19 had played in the loss of paid work in recent periods. When asked what element of pre-COVID life they hoped would not return in a post-COVID area, issues with low income were often mentioned, for example:

“Artists being taken for granted/not paid properly for work”

“Dancers being expected to work for a low fee”

“The abundance of ill paid work”

“The expectation that, because you love dance, you will always do it for nothing.”

The connection between adequate remuneration of work and societal “valuing” of dance was also a matter of discussion in the **Dance Conversations** study, with some respondents pointing out the difficulty of continuing in the profession in the absence of this connection:

“I’m just thinking about dance as an art form, and why do we do it. Under all of these circumstances it can be quite tough, but you continue doing it”; “I’m delighted to hear that you’re enjoying it, because you wouldn’t be doing it for anything else - for the money or the fame”.

## Hidden Costs: time for process

The costs associated with the time required to nurture creative process are hidden and seemingly disregarded within the nature of how dance is funded. The “duty to produce” described in the [Wellbeing and Caring](#) section was also noted in the *Think Tanks Report* as being facilitated by the existing funding structure, which dance artists identified as not



providing sufficient support for “research and development” and “time to process dance more deeply” (McGrath, 2021, p. 12, see also, pp. 6, 7).

*Light enters a space, picking out the head, back and arms of a dancer standing in darkness. She lifts her arms to her right side, both palms facing outwards as if pushing against something, and starts to turn on the spot towards the camera. She pivots slowly as the light disappears and then returns, her movement progressing throughout in an uninterrupted flow. She takes her time. [5.08-5.58]*

**Dance Conversations** respondents spent a great deal of time in their discussions sharing their creative process with one another. Processes varied, but the common theme across all discussions was a need for time and flexibility in how that time is defined as “time for dance”. One **Dance Conversations** respondent reflected on how she works in a “linear way”, but equally how when working on something that “it’s in my head all the time”.

A respondent also discussed the pressure she places on herself during her creative process due to the need to “produce”:

“I suppose I began to get a little frustrated with myself sometimes because there’s some form of conditioning in there where you always think you should be working towards something and you need have to have something very final and it needs to be a complete thing or unit to show at the end of whatever it is.”

For one **Dance Conversations** respondent, time for dance can be hindered by having to stop dance work to go to another job. For another respondent, time for dance happens whenever you can find it:

“[...] Work and the kids, and making applications, trying to set up a [...] studio [...] There will be a whole week when I cannot do anything and then there’s a time when it will all come out. I think when I was younger I would think I have to work in a studio every day but now...I realise this is how I work and this is the dynamic that allows me to connect to it.”

Some artists in the **Dance Conversations** study appreciated the slower pace of work during the pandemic, although this also resulted in income loss:

“[I liked] focussing on one thing when COVID made things slow down and I managed to do just one thing at a time. [But] financially it doesn’t really work out.”

## Multiple Jobbing

“I’d love to know, of all dance artists, what makes up their income and their career as a whole. If you had a pie chart to see, you know, what of that is their own creative work, or what of that is like someone else’s creative work that they’re involved in, what is teaching what is a supplement income, whatever it might be, and what is just getting by and being below the poverty line?” (Dance Conversations)

Finding time for process is also hindered by the multi-jobbing often required to sustain a livelihood in dance. **Dance Counts** survey respondents most commonly identified with the role of dancer/performers (39%), most were employed on a regular basis in a teaching capacity (64%), although a similarly high percentage were employed regularly as dancer/performers (54%) and choreographers (52%).

Most survey respondents (57%) reported spending all of their professional time on work relating to dance, however 23% spent only a minority of their professional time on such work.

The number of hours worked on dance in a typical week across all respondents fell into these categories:

- 0-29 hours: 45%
- 30-45 hours: 38%
- Over 45 hours: 18%

Finding time for dance was noted as an issue for some **Dance Conversations** respondents:

“For the past maybe month or two months I’ve had a couple of different jobs, which means that I haven’t been dancing as much as I like, and that’s also on me – I haven’t made the time after 10 o’clock at night to do that.”

Many respondents, however, pointed out the relative absence of ‘typical’ weeks and the often extremely variable nature of working patterns. 59% of survey respondents reported that the time they spent on work relating to dance had increased in the last five years, and 25% reported a decrease.

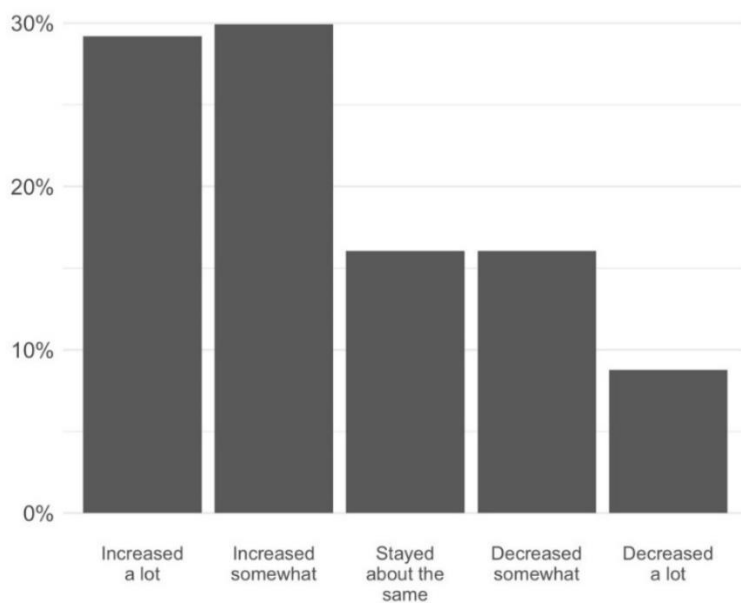


Figure 3: ‘Over the last 5 years, how has the number of hours you spend on work related to dance in a typical week changed?’

53% identified the COVID-19 pandemic as playing a key role in change.

**Dance Conversations** respondents across the different elements of the study (dance/film and focus groups) indicated that the time spent at home meant that they could become “re-immersed” in dance, even if not within ideal circumstances (see [Spaces for Dance](#) section).

Non-COVID factors associated with spending increasing time on dance work included expanding partnerships, becoming more ‘known’ or gaining higher professional visibility/recognition, an increase in funding received, being in a stage of career development, lessening caring responsibilities, and more time being spent on administration.

A decrease in time was often associated with increased caring responsibilities, health challenges or injury, and also with spending more time working in other fields.

## 2. Spaces for Dance

“I get this feeling sometimes, in NI specifically, we’re at the fringe of the continent really, and then even at that, we’re a tiny part of a tiny island, on the fringe of a continent, so sometimes I feel like we’re really isolated... especially now because of the circumstances, working across the borders is a lot harder.” (Dance Conversations)

Space was a recurring theme amongst respondents from both the **Dance Counts** survey and the **Dance Conversations** study. As indicated in the quote above from one **Dance Conversations** respondent, dance is impacted by, and occurs within, space that is physical, social and personal. Space is both the environment as well as the expanse in which work takes place.

Ireland’s geographic positioning as an island on both the periphery of Europe and Great Britain is relevant to the nurturing and development of dance. This peripheral positioning contributes to an impression of isolation but is also a source for collective intimacy of experience for those who engage in dance on and off the island of Ireland.

Here, we examine physical space from two perspectives:

1. the geographic location of where respondents from both studies access work;
2. the spaces used for dance practice and work (e.g., for training, choreography, rehearsal).

We also consider the social or collective space of dance, which includes considerations of connecting with the wider field of the dance profession through networks both in-person and digital. Both of these perspectives relate to, and have an impact on, personal space for dance.

### Locating and Accessing Space for Dance

The **Dance Counts** survey sought to capture where respondents live and where they locate and access work in dance. 43% of survey respondents reported living in an urban area, with Dublin being the most common location (35% of residents).

Other areas for residence on the island of Ireland are shown in Figure 4, coloured by number of respondents:

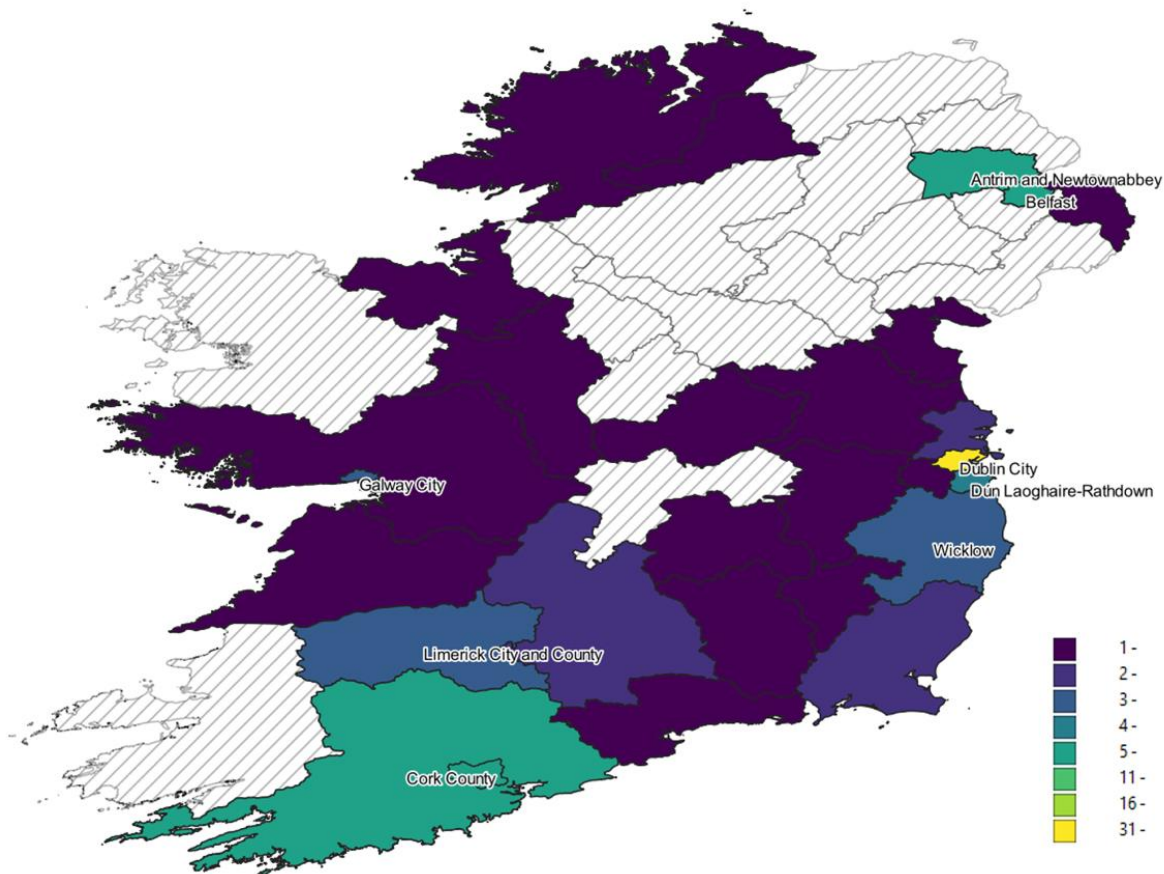


Figure 4: 'Where do you usually live?' (key = # respondents)

84% of survey respondents reported that they would work in the Republic of Ireland in a typical year, and 24% in Northern Ireland.

The **Dance Counts** survey supports prior Dance Ireland initiated research which indicates that where one lives on the island of Ireland has strong correlation with gaining access to work and professional networks (McGrath, 2021).

There is an urban/rural divide in relation to this access. Urban areas, and particularly Dublin in the Republic of Ireland and Belfast in Northern Ireland, dominate where respondents access work in dance. Figure 5 demonstrates that the areas most commonly identified as the location for *regular* work on the island of Ireland were Dublin (58%), Limerick (30%), Cork (29%), Belfast (20%) and Galway (20%):

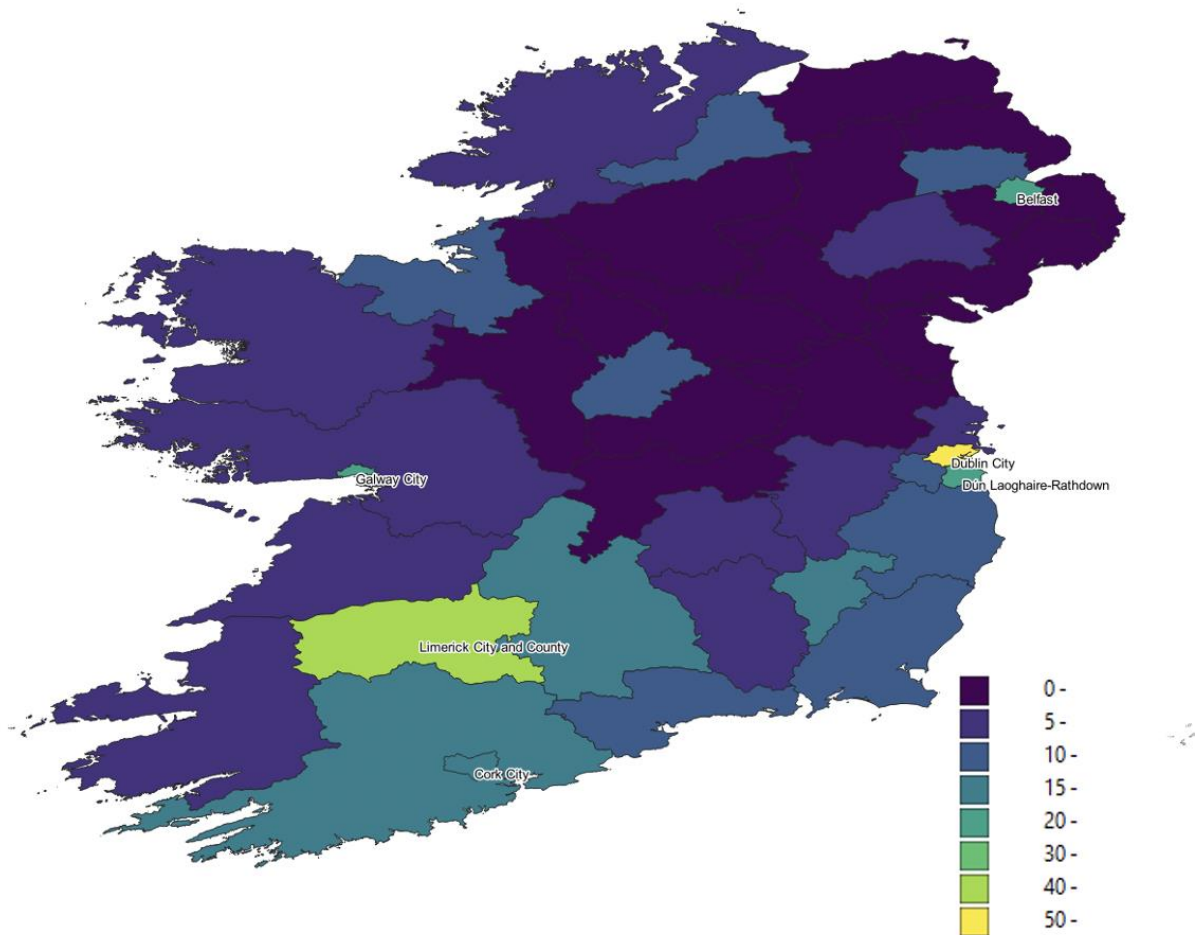


Figure 5: ‘In which of these areas do you regularly work (including touring)?’ (key = # respondents)

Survey questioning also considered the area where respondents worked most often. The most common responses here were Dublin (46%), Belfast (13%), Limerick (7%), and Cork (7%). Qualitative data from our research indicates that Derry is also a hub for dance.

When asked to identify *why* this was the area most often worked in, respondents identified four factors as key:

- Access to facilities (e.g. studios, rehearsal spaces, education)
- Access to networks of support and opportunity
- Their normal place of residence being nearby
- Working in a specific role, or with a specific organisation/venue

Accessibility and availability of studio space, particularly in terms of quantity of studios, was one of three areas of studio provision survey respondents identified as in need of improvement. Studios are largely located in the island’s urban areas.

As per Figure 6, 51% of *a//* respondents indicated that they could access studio space within 10km of their residence; this figure is 72% for those in urban areas, and only 15% for those in rural areas. 10% of respondents reported having to travel over 40km, and half of these lived in rural areas.

As such, those respondents residing in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged in accessing studio space.

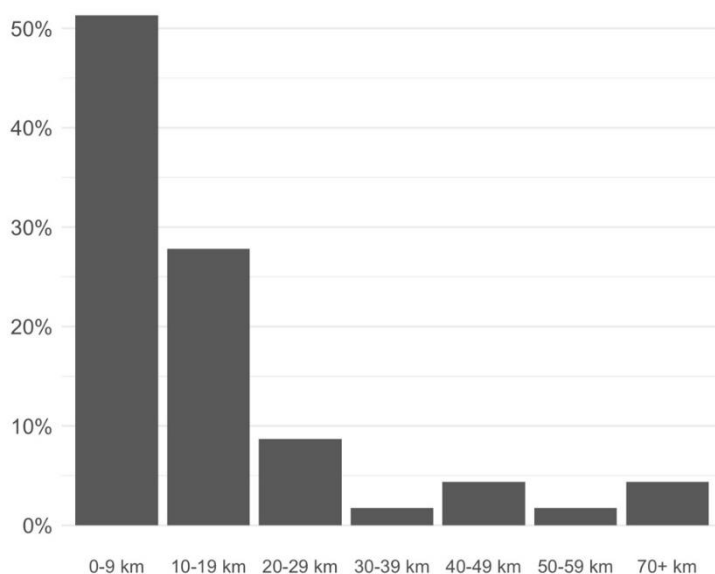


Figure 6: ‘How far do you need to travel to access studio space?’

Moving around and off the island is important for accessing work. One Northern Ireland-based **Dance Conversations** respondent illustrates:

“Most of my work is Derry based and I have taught in the Republic and performed in the Republic and different places, like Russia, Hong Kong.”

49% of **Dance Counts** survey respondents said they would work outside the island of Ireland in a typical year, with most of this group reporting that this would likely be for more than a month. 71% agreed that working outside Ireland is necessary for career development, with a

majority also agreeing that international partnerships are essential to creating and presenting work.

Respondents in Northern Ireland expressed similar views on this to respondents in the Republic. Reports of typically working outside of Europe were rare, but the most commonly referred-to non-European location was the US (5% of respondents). Findings in relation to movement off the island seemingly required for education and training in dance are discussed elsewhere in the [Education and Training](#) section.

Travel for work takes place for the purposes of touring dance but also due to the multi-jobbing nature of the profession (see [Costs of Dance](#) section). One **Dance Conversations** respondent indicated that they might be doing “three teaching projects in three different schools” simultaneously.

While travel may be common, it was not necessarily a feature of dance work welcomed by all **Dance Conversations** respondents, described by some as “exhausting”. In reflecting on the pandemic, many survey respondents hoped that altered patterns of travel would persist in a post-pandemic era.

These comments give an example of what respondents hoped to see less of in future:

“Constant travelling”

“In person only access to workshops and talks... online access has been a god send”

“Not being able to do parts of your work at home if you wish.”

“Too much travel”

“Unpaid travel time”

Yet, while one **Dance Conversations** respondent indicated that the slow-down forced by Covid restrictions may have re-calibrated work-life balance, the project cycle, remuneration and funding landscape for dance work makes this re-balance impractical to maintain (see [Costs of Dance](#) section).

The capability to travel for work is also associated with a number of other resources such as family care support and time, areas explored in both the [Costs](#) and [Wellbeing and Caring](#) sections.



## Dedicated Space and Conditions for Dance

The importance of dedicated space for work was a common theme across respondents of both studies. The *Dance Conversations* (2021) film indicates the necessary expanse of space that studios can provide:

*A dancer prepares her space for work. She walks, barefoot, across a large dance studio to open blackout curtains on windows more than twice her height. Shafts of natural light enter the space. Later, we see her lying on the studio floor, arms and legs spread out in a moment of stillness and relaxation. Potential space for movement stretches out in all directions around her. [9.28]*

*A woman dances in a narrow landing on a carpeted floor. Standing with her back to us facing a wall, she stretches her hands out to the edges of the available movement space. Both arms are still bent at the elbow when her little fingers make contact with the perimeters. [6.49]*

Having a strong geographic spread of affordable, quality facilities for dance that follow professional guidelines (Mackin & Curry, 2010) is understood as a statement of value regarding dance as a profession. Such space was described as “needed” and as “sacred”.

Respondents also indicated that having access and opportunity to work in a dedicated dance space is a marker of professional standing. Yet, respondents from the **Dance Conversations** study indicated that for a dancer to have dedicated space in which to work is “lucky”. **Dance Counts** survey respondents identified cost and affordability of studios as a barrier to accessing dedicated space for dance.

85% of survey respondents reported needing studio space for their work, and most respondents reported working in a dedicated space outside their home; for some this was provided at their own cost (26%), and for others this was provided by an employer (42%).

Data from the **Dance Counts** survey and **Dance Conversations** echo findings from previous sector-based research (Mackin & Curry, 2010; McGrath, 2021) that there is room for improvement on the quality of studio spaces available on the island.

**Dance Conversations** respondents particularly identified with one another on discussions about the importance of quality conditions of studio space.

Despite existing guidelines (Mackin & Curry, 2010), there are still many areas indicated as being in need of improvement in spaces designated for dance (even if not dedicated spaces built for

dance). Survey respondents referred to: flooring, mirrors, natural daylight, airflow, stereo equipment, opening hours, acoustics / sound proofing. It was also noted that, “DanceHouse sets a high standard that few other places can match”.

**Dance Conversations** respondents indicated that studio conditions have a direct impact on the quality of dance produced: “If I’m cold I can’t relax and it’s going to have an impact on my dancing” and that they have to “educate” people about the appropriate conditions needed for dance:

Respondent 1: “If I can be in a space that’s dedicated for the art form – you know that’s warm and clean and big enough”

Respondent 2: “that smells ok – any old space won’t do”

Respondent 1: “I’ve worked in cold and damp spaces and I’ve gotten really upset in the past ...[thinking]...I’m going to need to educate these people now”

These respondents also indicated that there is a link between feeling valued as a dance artist and the conditions of the spaces available for working in.

## Working in and from Home as Studio

Constraints on the availability of space and in-person contact and collaboration were the most common challenges survey respondents gave when asked about how the pandemic had challenged their professional practice.

For respondents with access to dedicated spaces for dance training and making, this work shifted from those locations to their homes as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

While the **Dance Conversations** film demonstrated the ways in which dancers may have capacity to “experiment with [the home environment] and use it and ...respond to it artistically”, both the danced responses and viewers’ reaction to the film indicated that the home environment is “not ideal [as it is]...an entrapped environment”.

Working in the home environment was described in both movement and discussion as restricting one’s access to an expanse of space, the opportunity to engage with others, and the quality studio conditions required for dance (Mackin & Curry, 2010).

How entrapment is embodied is represented in the danced responses captured in the *Dance Conversations* (2021) film:

*A woman dances under her kitchen table in a forest of table and chair legs. As she moves, we sometimes hear her limbs knock against wood as they collide with furniture. In the background, a washing machine enters its spin cycle. [7.20-8.20]*

Respondents' dance films capture the lived reality and clutter of domestic space: the noise of the washing machine; laundry hanging to dry; furniture and toys that are navigated and negotiated by the dancers.

One **Dance Conversations** workshop respondent reflects on how this resonated with his own experience:

“As a dancer most of the parts of the film connected with my experience...For example, the dancer dancing under the table, pushing the chair...in a way finding for free spaces... that’s what every dancer has been doing during the pandemic: pushing, clear out the space, for them at least to do yoga, any stretching [...]”

Respondents in **Dance Conversations** spoke of the impact of the lack of access to suitable space for training, and how this was exacerbated by the restrictions implemented during the global pandemic:

“I was training in my own room, and literally the space I had in my room by then was the size of this table”;

“there is loads of stuff from my daily life [in the space]. They’re kind of like an obstacle for my training. I always kick them, or I have to push them away to one side to train.”

See the [Education and Training](#) section for discussion of the impact of injuries due to inadequate space for training.

While some respondents found that private physical spaces in their homes allowed them to feel less “judged” while training and/or choreographing, for many **Dance Conversations** respondents, the everyday, domestic environment presented “obstacles”:

“...those moments where you know, like, you know, my [... child] comes in and is banging around the kitchen making a coffee and I'm trying to work away...”

These obstacles create feelings of vulnerability for training, work and development. One **Dance Conversations** respondent explains how the living room, under Covid restrictions, becomes a kind of ‘everywhere space’ that facilitates a sense of boundlessness in terms of the activity that is possible in the space—work, familial connection, mothering—but that also creates a sense of instability and insecurity:

“At the end of the day I’m in my living room ... but it’s not only my living room, it’s so many other things. It’s where I try to do my work, it’s also where [my child] spends a lot of his time, and where we would have cups of tea, and it’s where [my child] was born, it’s just a room of endless possibilities, and that is lovely and also a little bit tricky, there’s no real clear boundaries about what happens in that space”

Another **Dance Conversations** respondent indicates that (for those who could) there was a need to establish psychological boundaries for dancing when the physical boundaries were not there:

“It [home] was a really vulnerable place to be - if I wanted to do what I wanted to do, if I wanted to create, if I wanted to dance, I actually had to be brave enough to do it in my most intimate setting, which is my home in front of my family and take ownership and say,

‘this is my space. If you come in – I’m moving, I’m dancing – if you come in, I might be doing something crazy’”

Referring to “doing something crazy”, this respondent also points to findings relating to broader unfamiliarity with professional dance practice existing in the Irish context, touched on in the [Education and Training](#) section of the report.

## Collective / Social Spaces of Dance

The importance of being together with other dancers was a common theme amongst all **Dance Conversations** respondents. Isolation was a strong feeling emerging for many because of the restrictions put in place during the pandemic, as one **Dance Conversations** focus group respondent explains,

“The bond you have with other dancers to work in studio is different than when you find yourself alone. You can work alone but at the same time you need partnership / colleagues... being alone inside the house, it’s difficult to keep the motivation”

The opportunity to network and meet, to dance with others and see others dance not necessarily only for performance rehearsal, but also for sharing and exchange was described as important. **Dance Conversations** respondents also echoed earlier research that reflected a strong interest in meeting and sharing practices with colleagues from across the border (McGrath, 2021).

One respondent expressed surprise that more connections did not exist: “it's such a small island...We should know more about each other and dance is such a small community”. Festivals and professional development opportunities were noted as a key way for this to happen. However, the project-based work cycle and the life of balancing multiple jobs indicated that prioritising meeting and networking was a challenge:

Respondent 1: “there's all these lovely festivals where you could connect, I suppose, and you could meet up, but [...] you're constantly juggling like, oh, but I'm also teaching and doing this project, and...”

Respondent 2: “yes, tricky to kind of do the networking deal.”

Digital engagement provided opportunities for connection with others working in dance that would otherwise not be possible without travel. It also allowed dance companies, collectives, and groups to stay in touch. When asked in the **Dance Counts** survey ‘What are your thoughts on engaging with emerging digital / performance technologies? Do you have any concerns or experience any challenges in this area?’

Many respondents expressed concerns about the importance and primacy of in-person, ‘live’ performance without the ‘distancing’ associated with some aspects of digital technology.

There were also some concerns that these could devalue or ‘overtake’ live performance. Similarly, there were concerns around accessibility and equity with regards to technical barriers and the quality of supporting infrastructure.

Whilst several respondents expressed an interest in developing this area of their practice, or saw the potential for beneficial outcomes, many pointed out the additional costs associated with equipment, training, or the need to hire skilled collaborators, due to a lack of prior knowledge, or time to develop skills.

Nevertheless, the greater reach which digital presentation may afford was also noted, and many saw the possibilities of 'integrating' digital elements with live performance. The opportunity to meet online was not a substitute for being in the same physical space.

One **Dance Conversations** focus group respondent indicated that he and his fellow dancers "realized the difference between meeting people online and in physical space".

These spaces were described as requiring different "energy". One respondent described that the personal connections made during online meetings between dancers working together on a piece, did not immediately translate when they met together in the physical space.

## 3. Wellbeing and Caring

This section explores concerns regarding the wellbeing of those working in dance. The issues arising from the **Dance Counts** survey and the **Dance Conversations** study resonate strongly with the findings of the [2021 Think Tanks Report](#) (McGrath, 2021).

What is new here is the illustration of the extent and scope of the respondents' concerns. While much of what is discussed ties closely with matters covered in the [Costs of Dance](#) section, here we are afforded insight into respondents' frustration with the challenges of work-life balance associated with these costs.

This section also considers respondents' concern for their own physical wellbeing as this changes throughout their career, and the particular challenges faced by those with caring responsibilities.

### Work-life Balance

*“You never stop working. Like you have a duty to produce [and] make”  
(Dance Conversations)*

As the quote from a **Dance Conversations** focus group respondent above indicates, the precarious nature and multi-jobbing aspects of dance, which are discussed in the [Costs of Dance](#) section, create challenges in ensuring work-life balance. A culture of consistent overwork as an aspect of 'normality' in dance work prior to the pandemic was common amongst respondents in both studies.

The restrictions put in place during the pandemic afforded a welcome slowdown from this pace, however the resultant effect on work opportunities, income, and in-person practice also impacted on dancers' wellbeing.

*We see a close-up of a dancer's hands. They are clenched tight into fists, circling around each other. The tension of holding tight causes a slight tremor and blotches the skin. The hands release for a brief moment before clenching tight again. [9.46]*

Echoing the affective sense of living with constant tension expressed in the movement response from a **Dance Conversations** respondent above, the **Dance Counts** survey respondents refer to burnout, a frantic pace of work, long hours, and stress in some qualitative responses:

“Longer hours in rehearsal, late technical rehearsals, working on Saturdays. Being overworked and stressed during pre-production time.”

“Overworking and overwhelm being seen as normal.”

“The endless cycle of making work in response to funding cycles, with short life-span and no opportunity to revive/restage.”

“The frantic rat-race nature of the work. Now not being enough but always running to the next thing. No time for reflection and evaluation.”

“Working 6-day weeks 1 day off does not allow your body to recover”

The above responses indicate both the inevitability and the ensuing acceptance of burnout that is required when working freelance in dance, as also indicated in this **Dance Counts** survey response:

“Burnout. Sad truth of self-employment is that you must work when it’s there regardless of your health. Because you never know where your next job will be so you take it while you can.”

The toll this way of working takes on your health must, according to this respondent, be disregarded.

## Physical Wellbeing

Regard for physical wellbeing was a shared concern for respondents across both studies. In the **Dance Counts** survey, respondents drew attention to the increased challenges faced by dancers in maintaining their physical wellbeing as they age:

“Dance is the only art form that expects a person to maintain a certain level of fitness which becomes increasingly difficult as the years roll on. [...] what about the accumulation of injuries that aren't officially a disability but that negatively impact a dancer’s health as we age? How as a community can we create space and support for these realities with the increase of ageing dancers and dance makers?”



This concern was also articulated in a discussion about the impact of injuries on career paths in the **Dance Conversations** focus group discussion: "you maybe cannot perform forever. You have to navigate that. You start choosing projects that maybe [do not require the physicality]"

The increased risk of injury due to a lack of, or inadequate, training facilities (i.e., not enough room to move in, unheated premises, lack of a professional, sprung dance floor) was raised in both the **Dance Conversations** study and the **Dance Counts** survey. These issues were seen to be exacerbated by particular challenges to physical wellbeing and work fitness experienced during the global pandemic, as evidenced in these survey responses:

"Lack of access to space to move and an injury triggered by stress [...]."

"Losing my fitness"

"Not being able to train, its so hard being stuck in a small space."

"Not having the facilities available to maintain technique & lack of job opportunities

"Stamina and maintenance"

"Staying fit and healthy and show ready."

## Caring, Parenthood, and Dance

"We are professionals, this is our work, we need space, we need childcare and dedicated time."

"We know how the dance world is cruel for mothers and to have kids."

(Dance Conversations)

The impact of caring responsibilities on the working conditions of respondents was a strong shared theme to emerge across the **Dance Conversations** study and the **Dance Counts** survey. In the survey, 30% of all respondents answered positively to having a caring responsibility for a child/children, with a further 4% of respondents caring for another person, and 3% of respondents caring for both a child/children and another person.

Whilst most respondents overall were women (80%), women were also more likely to report caring responsibilities than men. As a point of reference, whilst CSO Ireland data shows 25% of births are to mothers who are in their 20s, and 66% to mothers in their 30s, it was extremely unusual for **Dance Counts** survey respondents in their 20s to report caring for children, and more common for respondents in their 40s and 50s to report this.

All four respondents in two of the **Dance Conversations** cross-border exchange pairs were mothers, and this served as an important point of connection and sharing across their conversations. A common thread was the difficulty of juggling caring and professional roles as a dance artist, and the impact this juggling of “a dual identity, as a mom and as an artist” has on working practices:

“there’s a lot of carrying, juggling, holding, holding space, holding people, and then the sense of some things being fleeting and watching it go by, and then holding on to some moments and them just... disappearing”.

*A pregnant dancer holds her arms out wide to her sides, palms turned up, in the shape of a balance scales. The arm-scales jerk suddenly twice to the left tipping her into a side bend. She rights herself. The arm-scales tip her over again. [11.38]*

In one of the **Dance Conversations** pairs, one dancer was pregnant and the other had recently given birth, and their conversation touched on issues connected with the profound impact that pregnancy and childbirth have on a dancer’s corporeality:

“Post pregnancy, post-birth, you’re trying to find your body again, and that can be really challenging but also liberating when you can find the dance from within”

“My body’s kind of aching. I get tired quickly.”

There was also acknowledgement of the need for breastfeeding support:

“with breastfeeding exclusively you are needed, you’re just on tap, you just need to be responding and you can’t really be away longer from your baby than for an hour at a time.”

The challenges to career sustainability presented by the proximity required to support breastfeeding continues for dancers with children of school-going age, as evidenced in several **Dance Counts** survey responses about where dancers work:

“You cannot stray too far as a female with children in school”

“Being a dance artist and female with children means you can be restricted in what you can achieve as a choreographer compared to single males, as you are not as free to travel to residencies or access opportunities outside your area”.

This issue also impacts on the ability of dance artists with caring responsibilities to travel overseas to present work and engage in international network development, as indicated in the **Dance Counts** survey:

“Making / presenting work outside of the region I live is challenging as it takes too much co-ordination and expense to manage caring responsibilities if I were to travel for rehearsal / production/ networking”

“I used to work more outside of Ireland but that was pre-pandemic and again because of my caring responsibilities it is more complicated for me to travel for long periods now.”

In the **Dance Conversations** study, in addition to discussion of physical changes and changes to mobility (i.e., diminished access to opportunities that require high mobility), there was also discussion of the impact of parenthood on creative processes, especially in the context of reduced time for practice due to a lack of childcare support, and particularly when children are very young:

“I’ll try and do it while he sleeps, but that doesn’t really work”.

*A woman’s dance is interrupted by a crying toddler entering the frame. The woman stops her work to kneel down and comfort her child, feeling the little one’s forehead with the palm of her hand to check her temperature. [4.20]*

The issue of having to use domestic spaces to work in was also a shared experience, with all artists with children discussing the challenges of having to use family spaces to train and choreograph in, especially during the global pandemic. As one **Dance Conversations** respondent described, also referred to in the [Spaces for Dance](#) section:

“If I wanted to dance, I actually had to be brave enough to do it in my most intimate setting, which is my home in front of my family”

*We see the torso and arms of a woman dancing in her living room in the space between a table and a bookshelf. Her dance is accompanied by the off-screen sounds of a baby fretting, and a man’s voice singing a lullaby. [3.00]*

Responses to the **Dance Counts** survey provide insight into the impact caring roles have on the amount of time respondents can dedicate to their practice, with “motherhood” “having a child” and “creating a family” cited as reasons for decreased time spent on work related to dance over the past five years. Correspondingly, this time pressure eased for some respondents with older children:

“as my children grew and became more independent I could take on more work.”

Some respondents cited caring responsibilities as a reason for the longest period they had gone without paid work in dance:

“when I was taking care of small children, I was not working in dance for a number of months at a time”.

In both the **Dance Conversations** project and the **Dance Counts** survey, caring responsibilities are shown to impact on the ability of carers, especially women who are mothers, to sufficiently sustain their professional dance practice.

Caring responsibilities are shown to reduce access to time for training and creative processes, and capacity to travel for work, professional development/training, and networking opportunities. Both the **Dance Conversations** study and the **Dance Counts** survey evidence the need for dedicated support for respondents with caring responsibilities in order to provide gender equity and career sustainability for carers.

These findings align with those of the [2018 Balancing Acts survey](#) of over 2,500 workers from the performing arts industry in the UK (across dance, music and theatre, in both on and offstage roles) conducted by researchers at Birkbeck University in partnership with the Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA) organisation. This survey found that 43% of performing arts workers surveyed who had left the industry cited caring responsibilities as the biggest deciding factor, with 76% of all respondents with caring responsibilities having to turn down work opportunities due to a lack of childcare support (this figure rose to 80% for women, and 85% for freelance workers).

## 4. Education and Training

This section addresses issues related to dance education and training discussed by respondents to both the **Dance Conversations** study and the **Dance Counts** survey. Comparing experiences of dance education was a topic of interest across all discussions in **Dance Conversations**. Of the six artists who participated in the choreographic exchange, four spoke about having to travel overseas to access professional dance training, one spoke of inward migration to Ireland to attend the MA in Dance Performance at the University of Limerick, and one spoke of having no conservatoire dance training.

The experiences of these artists map on to the responses from the **Dance Counts** survey, which show that 59% of respondents had undertaken professionally accredited training outside the island of Ireland, and 41% had undertaken such training within the island.

As is the case in many creative fields, the picture revealed by the **Dance Counts** survey responses suggests a very high level of formal qualification, with the majority of respondents (54%) being educated to postgraduate level.

### Access to Professional Training

Access to professional training for dance was a topic of concern for many respondents across both studies. The majority of **Dance Counts** survey respondents (76%) agreed that training outside Ireland is necessary for career development, as shown in Figure 7:

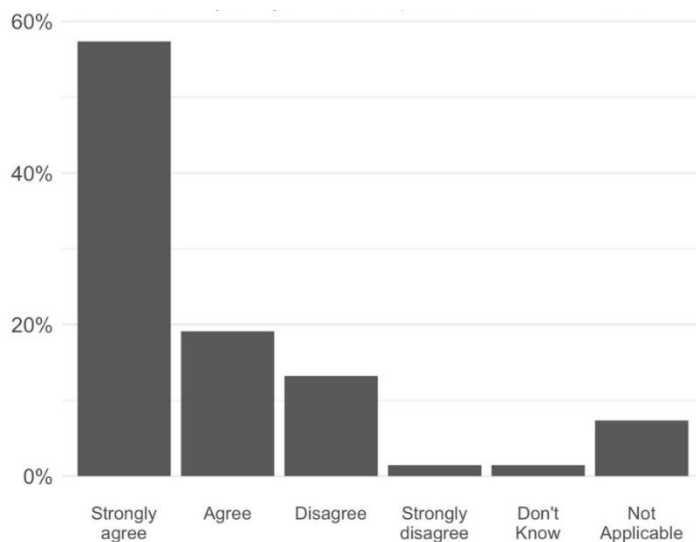


Figure 7: 'To what extent would you agree with the statement 'It is/was necessary for my career development to train outside Ireland?'

In the **Dance Conversations** study, the comparative lack of dance education and training infrastructure in Northern Ireland, including the discontinuation of Ulster University's BA (Hons) in Dance in 2015 and the lack of sufficient access to dedicated dance studio facilities such as DanceHouse in Dublin, was flagged as having a particularly negative impact on training opportunities for dance artists in the North:

*"we don't have a DanceHouse or a Dance Limerick or Firkin Crane – there's not a designated dance centre either for professional work, studios, or for training, there's no higher education course [...] There's a real barrier there with infrastructure."*

One NI participant did have regular access to a dedicated dance studio facility in Derry, although she raised the issue of inadequate funds to support activities in the space: "we get this lovely big space, but we get no money to programme anything and no money to make anything".

The barrier to the development of dance on the island created by a lack of full-time, professional dance training has been cited continually in sectoral reports discussing dance education in Ireland since the 1980s (Brinson (1985); Leatherdale and Todd (1998); Marzin (2003); O'Brien (2010); McGrath, O'Brien, Parnell (2013); Roche (2016); McGrath (2021)), and the **Dance Counts** survey responses evidence a continued perception that professional dance training can only be accessed overseas.

The inequality of access to professional dance training created by the high cost of overseas training has been compounded in Ireland by Arts Council of Ireland's discontinuation of dance training bursaries, with a **Dance Conversations** respondent explaining:

“my training was limited because of not being able to access or afford further training abroad.”

Infrastructural underdevelopment in dance education was seen to have an impact on career trajectory, as one **Dance Conversations** respondent explains,

“I wouldn't take myself seriously because I don't have the conservatoire training that my colleagues have. I wouldn't take myself seriously as an artist. You live in these spaces of regret and of missed opportunity. That's shaped my career”.

The option of access to professional dance training on the island was cited by several respondents to the **Dance Counts** survey as being the “one change” needed to improve dance on the island of Ireland in the coming years:

“Formalised dance education at secondary and post-secondary level to serve the development of Dance artists and build a sustainable future for all.”

“A good 3rd level course, with highly qualified teachers. Giving participants the qualifications to work, either as performers or qualified teachers, etc.”

“Access to conservatoire level training for young dancers.”

“Full time vocational ballet & contemporary school with linked company.”

“Increased access for young people to formal dance education in Ireland.”

It must be noted, that although the lack of full-time, professional training on the island remains the case for dancers wishing to pursue a career focussing on classical ballet technique (for which dancers - especially female dancers - typically need to enter full-time training from the age of 15/16 at the latest), the four-year BA (Hons) in Contemporary Dance at the University of Limerick (established 2017) now provides third level students with between 25 and 27 hours of scheduled dance training per week, which is on par with comparable BA courses in Contemporary Dance in the UK and Australia. The first cohort of graduates from this course completed their studies in 2021, with some going directly into dance project employment.

## Dance Education for Children and Youths

Respondents to the **Dance Counts** survey also drew attention to the need for the integration of dance education delivered by qualified teachers into primary and secondary school curricula in Ireland. This was identified as a critical developmental area for the sustainable growth of the dance ecology on the island, with several respondents identifying this as the “one change” needed to improve dance in Ireland in the coming years:

“Dance more integrated in schools, in the curriculum, in the lives of children and young people. Making dance available to a wider audience, dance not as an elitist art form.”

“A strong engagement in dance education at schools. I think this will support building positive attitudes towards dance and build audiences for now and the future. Investment in dance education.”

“More emphasis on educational training to build an audience, awareness, and pathways for future generations.”

“More attention to quality youth dance work.”

In addition to benefits for the young people themselves, the development of equitable access to dance education from an early age is noted in these responses as having wider societal benefits in developing dance-literate audiences and creating a positive public perception of dance as an artform and career.

## Additional Perspectives

In the **Dance Counts** survey, respondents were asked what “one change” they thought would most improve dance in Ireland in the coming years. Some of these responses connect with the key areas of shared concern across both the **Dance Conversations** study and the **Dance Counts** survey, and have already been included throughout the analyses in our report.

In this final section, we bring attention to further calls for change noted as being of significant importance to respondents. Key areas are highlighted below, along with indicative comments.



As discussed in Section 1, [Costs of Dance](#), workers in dance (especially freelance workers) are experiencing high levels of financial precarity. Several respondents noted the importance of addressing issues connected with the regulation of fees and payment both within the dance sector, and also for dance artists working in other performing arts sectors:

“A fee that reflects the hours of work that performers put into contracts. Rights to protect and support freelancers through the instabilities of the profession...proper living wage for freelancers.”

“Putting monetary value to our skill and expertise, which includes from theatre directors and those working within the arts industry.”

“Setting minimum payment and fees for dancers by an external representative body as a means of supporting and regulating the industry.”

Ideas for change connected with funding were also noted, with respondents providing thoughts on funding sources and amounts, funding scheme length and scope, and challenges associated with the administration required by funding applications and reporting:

“Increased support and investment from a broader range of sources.”

“Larger pots of money available to freelancers to actually produce work, not just undergo 'development'.”

“More financial support across ALL dance styles.”

“Supporting the artist - not the idea, for an extended period of time in a specific area/location (ie. 3 - 5 years).”

“There are excessively complicated administrative procedures for artists in order to receive funding/ get residencies/ have work made/ seen. This paperwork and constant self analysis of art work to validate artistic credibility is doing more damage to the art work.”

Connecting with both Section 1, [Costs of Dance](#), and Section 3, [Wellbeing and Caring](#), several respondents called for tailored support and financial assistance schemes for dancers:

“A better support system for dancers when faced with injury or the inability to work.”

“Properly paid childcare to support dancing mothers, so equalising opportunities.”

“Universal Basic Income is a start, so many dance artists have spoken about the relief they felt with PUP knowing a regular income was coming in each week.”

“Dance artist recognised as artists, therefore eligible for the artist tax exemption.”

Ideas for change associated with equity of access, inclusion, and diversity were also raised by several respondents, with diversification of audience outreach, and regional and rural development beyond Dublin being noted:

“More awareness needs to be brought to members of the public with disabilities especially relating to dance.”

“More inclusion and a focus on audience building. Dance in Ireland looks at itself as a very small tight community and this pushes others out.”

“Create a more equitable ecology by investing more time and resources in dance practitioners, studios & venues outside of Dublin.”

“More diversity of dance artists being foregrounded across every region in Ireland; urban and rural.”

Issues of access to space were also addressed, with respondents providing thoughts for change that connect with the discussion in Section 2, [Spaces for Dance](#):

“Converting empty, unused, spacious, tall ceiling buildings in towns to dance studios with sprung floor, mirrors and proper heating”.

“More professional facilities and studios accessible and affordable to all dance artists - so there’s less hostility and more collaborations.”

“More space and access to space all over the country. More access to dance all over the country.”

Strengthening networks across the island was noted by some respondents as being an important area for development:

“Better national touring networks”

“Joined up thinking, talking and strategising between funders, dance organisations, presenters, producers, artists.”

Respondents also looked beyond the island when considering developments needed in dance education, with European models cited as benchmarks for educational and professional standards:

“Dance needs to be a recognised subject in the Irish education system to bring us in line with other EU countries.”

“If Ireland/NI wants to create dancers that will be competitive on an international level, the country needs to establish a national ballet school similar to Canada's National Ballet School, or the many national ballet schools in Europe such as Tanz Akademie Zurich or the John Cranko school in Germany.”

“I do think a stronger connection to what's going on in the rest of Europe will increase the standard of dance in Ireland”

And finally, some respondents provided ideas for improving levels of recognition and respect for dance across the island:

“An all-island approach to the arts that gains respect from all sections of society.”

“Increased recognition of dance as a skilled profession- would lead to better working conditions and would prevent talented students from becoming discouraged about pursuing dance as a career.”

“Recognition from the government and the public [...].”

“Recognition of its value to the economy & society”

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# Researcher Biographies

## Dr Peter Campbell

Dr Peter Campbell is a Reader in Sociology based in the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology at the University of Liverpool, working primarily in the fields of social research methods and cultural policy research. His most recent monograph on these subjects is entitled "*Persistent Creativity: Making the Case for Art, Culture and the Creative Industries*".

## Dr Victoria Durrer

Dr Victoria Durrer is Ad Astra Research Fellow in Cultural Policy at UCD. Her research considers the conditions and value of artistic practice as spatial and relational social, cultural, and professional endeavours and has published widely on these subjects. She is committed to publicly-engaged research, having co-founded Brokering Intercultural Exchange, an international research network on arts and cultural management, and the all-island research network, Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland, both of which stress the importance of knowledge exchange between practitioners and researchers. Her research has received funding from the Higher Education Authority, the Irish Research Council, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Royal Society of Edinburgh (UK), and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) in addition to sector-based funding.

## Dr Aoife McGrath

Dr Aoife McGrath is a dance practitioner-scholar and Senior Lecturer at Queen's University Belfast. She has worked professionally as a dance artist and choreographer in Germany and Ireland and has served as the Dance Adviser for the Irish Arts Council. Current projects are funded by EU Horizon 2020, the Irish Government's Co-operation with Northern Ireland Funding Scheme, the HEA North South Fund, and AHRC/Future Screens NI. She has published widely on dance on the island of Ireland, including a monograph, *Dance Theatre in Ireland:*

*Revolutionary Moves* (2013), and most recently a co-edited special issue of the *Theatre Research International* on 'Sounding Corporeality' (42.2, 2021) with Prarthana Purkayastha

(Royal Holloway), Tereza Havelková (Charles University Prague) and Marcus Tan (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore). She is Co-President of the Irish Society for Theatre Research, serves on the Board of Directors of Dublin Dance Festival, and is a choreographer-performer member of Dance Ireland. <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/persons/aoife-mcgrath>

## About Dance Ireland

Dance Ireland is the national dance development organisation and, true to our origins, we continue to be the representative body for the professional dance community in Ireland. We support the development of all forms of dance in Ireland through professional development opportunities and advocacy. We work with our Members and our Partners to progress dance in Ireland ensuring sustainable future for dance and a credible career for those committed to dance as a profession. For further information see <https://www.danceireland.ie/>

## About Theatre & Dance NI

Theatre & Dance NI is the sectoral support and resource organisation for theatre & dance in Northern Ireland. The company was formed following a merger between Theatre NI and Dance Resource Base in April 2020. For further information see <https://theatreanddancenl.org>

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