

## **ProDanceLeeds Open Meeting - Thurs 14th September 2017**

Note: This is a rough record of the discussion at the PDL open meeting. Some contributors are marked by XX if they had not specified they wanted to be identified. If anyone is unhappy with how their comment is expressed below, please contact us.

### **Key points from below:**

The beginning of the Rough Transcript, has an update from PDL.

In the interim,

- A skills sharing model may take place
- YD will look at incorporating people's ad hoc classes on a website
- NSCD and YD may be able to offer some space for interim ad hoc classes
  
- The details of this are being ironed out
- This is not long term as is not sustainable

We will be meeting with ACE at the end of the month to discuss PDL future options and will update everyone then. PDL may not start again until 2018.

### **Summary of Actions to be taken after meeting:**

- Pro dance to produce minutes and distribute them
- Pro dance to consider their options after a feedback conversation with ACE
- Weike Eringa (WE) to explore a regular studio slot for 'artist sharing practice' (ideally weekly)
- WE to explore a listings function on the YD website for anyone and everyone teaching professional class or workshops – by way of an interim solution
- WE and Janet Smith (JS) to feed back from this meeting to Leeds Dance Partnership

### **Rough Transcript**

ProDanceLeeds (PDL): Our initial plan was to take PDL under an NPO (which would mean our funding would have covered a period of five years) and write a bid to cover the interim period before NPO funding kicked in. This was our focus. Unfortunately this fell through so we had to re-think. This timeline got pushed further back as we were really busy with Gracefool work. Managed to submit new bid end of May 2017, only found out August as it takes 3 months to assess. Feedback was that it wasn't financially comparable with other applications on the table. This is all we know so far.

GFA works on a project by project basis and you cannot repeat fund the same project. We had to structure the two initial bids as a pilot project and development project but we

shouldn't really be able to put a third bid in. At the moment, there isn't really anything in between GFA or NPO funding that would give us funding for a project which would stay the same. We had continual business development sessions with Space2 in the last GFA to explore how we might the project more sustainable/efficient in the management systems.

Some things in this recent bid:

- Graduate development scheme (mentoring for recent graduates wanting to teach)
- Connecting more with existing organisations in the city (improv exchange etc)
- Connecting with other artist lead projects across the country (BDN, Groundwork Pro, Brighton Dance Network, TripSpace, ID) to share information and learn from one another.

Bid was a big bid in terms of ask from the arts council, but we don't have a huge amount of cash going into the project to create a lot of match funding.

In business development sessions we undertook extensive evaluation of the project and have a lot of information about this. We also had an external evaluator, Sarah Spanton. We have an extensive evaluation report by Sarah Spanton, we have a summary report which will be made available on our blog this week. Although we managed to reduce the administration time on the project, it is still substantial. The main thing we discovered is that this project is not financially sustainable without the Arts Council.

### **Key figures -**

Average class attendance: 7.42

Average income of class: £16.28

Pay: £45 for teachers per class - we raised this to £90 per session for the recent bid. We want to value people's time and expertise, take into account travel time and planning time. We also have travel and accommodation budget for non-local teachers. We sometimes have to pay for studios - some offer for free but not all of our partners do this.

Average total administration time: 20 hours per week

Classes are £4 a class but £3 if you buy ten in advance. We have resisted putting this figure up due to the very very low pay in our sector.

You can see that taking into account the above figures, the classes are not sustainable at this time. We would need to charge a lot more to cover costs and do not think this would be feasible for the community to pay. The community is currently not big enough to have a higher average attendance. I.E. it needs investment at this stage

The issue of how to make professional class work has been a long term problem across the country for many years. The other artist lead networks are also struggling - BDN has just lost their funding. Groundwork Pro initially didn't get their second round of funding, but are operating under Welsh Arts Council system. Other networks are struggling. It's precarious.

Susanne Thomas (ST): The reason that ID have survived for so long is because it has been going in with an organisation. What is the latest news about that in terms of PDL?

PDL: We haven't had a chance to speak to the partner organisations yet.

Wieke Eringa (WE): Yorkshire Dance had lengthy discussions with PDL about coming under the organisation. We discussed how to make PDL still artist lead under another organisation. Dance City has managed to put on professional classes for free for professionals, but this is a much cheaper model.

Gianluca: The rate for teachers is a lot lower at Dance City. (Editor note: They also have their own studios, therefore don't have to spend the administration time liaising with different venues, putting together jigsaw puzzle of space, marketing is less because everyone knows it is at one venue, therefore that information doesn't have to be put out all the time e.t.c)

PDL: It can be difficult to access classes there - there is a course there that uses the professional class as part of their training. We have heard professionals can struggle to get into class because places are given to students.

GV: There might be a different business model in the wider organisation that we don't know about/ agreement that we don't know about which may support the classes financially.

WE: NPOs were told they could only get uplift if it was specifically addressed the creative case for diversity. The relatively high cost of the Pro Dance model made it difficult for YD to consider. Also small space for justifying uplift made it difficult. LDP are re-looking at how LDP will work and what the programme looks like - within LDP there is a strong feeling that something like this should happen but needs to decide what is priority.

PDL: We haven't had a huge amount of time to re-look at where we stand now, and still haven't had a chance to speak to partners/ arts council etc. Important to note there is still a possibility to re-submit this same bid with some changes but this might be unlikely due to specifications of GFA system.

CG: How much match funding did you have?

PDL: Not much - about 30% of the overall ask which is not much.

WE: Is it worth talking about possibilities in relationship with Phoenix? My understanding is that they were very supportive in the 'bridge' period earlier on this year.

PDL: We did work with them in the interim, but is tricky because they only accept a few extra people per company class, often require a CV and booking in advance and Phoenix are off on tour/working away for periods of time, so it is not regular.

CG: Other sources of funding? Esme Fairbairn?

PDL: Legal structure - very difficult to access different funding sources without having legal status. Trusts and foundations often require legal structure and more rigorous financial processes. Part of the bid we had turned down was to do this officially and we may have then been able to access different funding sources. Although often these pots of funding are often focused on community projects.

WE: It became clear that we were not able to ask for such a huge uplift (Editors note: additional ask to ACE on top of the existing programme) as part of the NPO, PDL would have been a huge amount of money on top and we had to let it go.

GV: Whilst I was at NSCD we also had a conversation but it would also have been very difficult for NSCD to apply with PDL under the organisation, as a new NPO.

Would a smaller version or cheaper version might be better than nothing? Eg: four classes instead of five, three administrators instead of four. It's really important to emphasise that there is no dance scene without dancers and this is the first time in years I have seen so many people staying in Leeds and this is because of this. Even if we find a smaller version it has to happen. Leeds can't be a dance city without dance classes.

GV: I absolutely agree with you. But I've been teaching free classes all this week and we've only had three people most days. Today was the first day we had seven. As much as we could think of making something smaller, we also have to see it from a business point of view otherwise it just can't move forward. We have to create a case for ACE to keep supporting it, we have to be quite proactive in terms of attendance.

PDL: There is something also to be said for marketing, we didn't know you had class this week and we were in the same building.

Rachel and Rebecca's roles both encompass marketing. We put out so much information, but artists don't come for so many reasons including transient nature of work, other jobs e.t.c.

In terms of administration, we have been teaching ourselves for two years and it has taken much more time for that reason. ACE are interested in an artist lead project but it takes so much longer because we aren't trained to have the administrative skills. This therefore also means so much time away from being an artist that this starts to become difficult. So do you then use trained administrators, which may take slightly less time. But then they are not as involved in the community which poses different problems. (Editors note: PDL take classes themselves, get to know people who attend, get their feedback on the classes and through their own creative work, have an understanding of what people need to be able to sustain an artistic career)

VG: Brainstorming short term solutions - Eg: using the PDL website/ social media pages for open classes. Or the new YD website?

WE: If people are interested I could talk to marketing team about this.

GV: But, if we carry on keeping the classes running somehow - eg residencies/ GFA etc - is this taking away from the project and what we are trying to support? It does affect everyone else.

PDL: That's a good point to make. In an ideal world there would be lots of options, two classes etc. But there isn't a big enough community to support a range of competing classes. In the past we have asked people to come to us if they have residencies so we can pay them to teach and therefore support them with their artistic work. Therefore there would not be a split or competition for participants etc. Sometimes this doesn't work for various

reasons, so classes lead for a few days as part of someone's residency have sometimes existed alongside ProDance. However, if a class was set up that could run regularly in the interim, it may look like classes can happen without funding, which of course it can't in the long term. The likelihood is (as this has happened repeatedly in the past) that the class drops off and doesn't work because people are giving time for free. We don't want to stop people doing this of course, but it's important that ACE understand that this is not a viable long term solution.

ST: There has also already been a bridging period so this is tricky to find a way around it.

XX: There are also other people wanting to start teaching careers so this is difficult for them

XX: Is there something we can do and call it something else in the interim to keep a provision going?

PDL: A website could be a good answer where it is more ad hoc and people let others know if there is something happening/you are putting a class on for a few days. I guess if it's just to have a notice board then perhaps it doesn't need loads of info.

ST: What is the timeline looking like for bridging period?

PDL: This depends what the arts council says, if it is just changing a few things it may not take so long. But it may take longer if we have to re-angle the project. If the problem is with the system, that ACE cannot fund something like PDL anymore, then we have a bigger problem. And even if they say we can put another one in we will find ourselves in the same place in 18 months.

ST: But we would hope this would be as part of Leeds Dance Partnership?

WE: I can't speak on behalf of LDP because their/our plans are still in development. You have our commitment that we will raise it again, but we can't promise anything on their behalf.

Janet Smith (JS): It is on the agenda, because LDP is about making the city flourish.

GV: If the feedback is financial there is the option of scaling back eg: 3 classes per week, lowering fee etc.

ST: Numbers - is there a way of boosting numbers once classes do happen? Another thing is space - can we get more for free?

WE: The only reason we can't offer space every day is because of residency commitments. Is there a question around timings of residencies etc?

PDL: This is also why we haven't experimented more with different timings of classes because of residencies. It eats into people's time in the studio. They often have to finish at five because the buildings close or the studio space is needed for commercial hire.

JS: Good to have the option of keeping it happening but scaling it back. We are developing a groundswell of artists in Leeds, if we could source local artists more this would cut back travel etc.

Editors note: We do not offer travel and accommodation to local artists. This is only budgeted for non-local artists. At the moment the percentage split roughly 60% local teachers to 40% non-local and we operate the budget on on this percentage.

GV: This doesn't cut back the communication/ administration necessarily. There are four of you, you are also artists doing your own thing, how much do you want to carry this on your shoulders/ support this all yourselves?

WE: One of the things that Pro Dance says works really well is the integration of artistry and administration. Another way would be to hand that over to an administrator, but you've always argued for the benefits of it being hand in hand. 20 hours administration a week would be a lot for just three classes.

PDL: We have managed to reduce our hours massively since we started, but three classes a week is just as much administration as five classes. Still send contract to teacher, still make payment, still liaise with them e.t.c This is harder to argue to the arts council to fund because then the artistic spending side is even less comparatively to admin.

Also important to note that that is not all the hours we are being paid for just how long it has taken. Actual hours we are paid for is more like twelve per week.

WE: It is an integrated process with artists/ administrators, which is a model which works well.

PDL: It's important to note that this was a project we were originally supposed to create as a model we could pass on to other artists. At some point it wouldn't be relevant for us to run the class, we have a change in Gracefool work or an increase that means other people need to take it on who can focus on it for a prolonged period of time.

In terms of having multiple administrators there is an important curatorial aspect to this which is artistic and seeks to incorporate a lot of different styles. We are really trying to take on board everyone's feedback in terms of teachers etc, and this is important to have multiple artists to have creative discussions about how the classes are programmed and what the community need.

JS: Could YD take this on? It sits under YD's remit. Thinking about Juncture and this being a curatorial venture. Could this be something that is done through YD as an artist development project. Could this be a model that works?

WE: In terms of commitment absolutely. They won't accept an application from us.

JS/ ST: Could this be administration? Marketing?

WE: With NSCD becoming an NPO and with some responsibility for artist development also, perhaps this is also something NSCD could provide?

ST: Perhaps both organisations could work together on this? Because there are classes at NSCD - could this somehow be embedded?

JS: There's two issues to manage - costs of student education means that they need to get value for their money and this means attention in class and space. But at third year level if it is small groups, it's great to have someone who is a professional come in and take class with them. We just discussed how we could provide this at a small cost which goes into student hardship fund. We are trying to figure out how to make this work. We have to grow the capacity to find out how to make it work.

XX: Proposition: could extra-curricular classes at NSCD potentially be open for professionals?

JS: I can take this back to the staff. Enhancement is something that is part of student development but could look at how this might work with numbers. How do we get info out there? Could this be via the YD website page?

GV: Don't want to sound pessimistic but I know in organisations that everyone works at capacity. If there was a collaboration it's important to highlight who is doing what - using both websites is not necessarily the best use of time. Perhaps we create space for some artists or an artists to do curatorial work. If there is a pot of money that we can invest in artists? It's about creating work and sustainability for artists. If this is a case for reducing the project, perhaps there is a case for having another meeting with the institutions to make sure we are not overstretching?

CG: Trying to cut back is not necessarily an answer, perhaps this is just not a GFA project anymore? Worth talking to the two NPO's in the room, looking at other trusts and foundations.

PDL: This was going to be in this GFA but it's tricky to find time to do this without being paid to do so.

CG: Is it worth finding ways to share workload etc?

PDL: This is all definitely worth looking at further, but just being aware that if we are starting a new model it's going take a long time to start all over again and make a new one. This is something we have taken two years to craft and create efficient models of doing things. It also isn't easy to hand over to others because it takes a long time to understand the processes and how it all works.

GV: i think it is totally fine for you guys to go away after this meeting and see what the arts council says and make your own decisions about the projects.

JW: What are your questions about legal structures that is stopping you?

PDL: We spent time thinking and talking about this with business development sessions but it's now just the time it will take to do this which we now don't have any funding for. There are also issues with what structure to take according to how we operate financially that need unpicking further.

AM: Is there a connection between Pro class and Verve? Possibility to use the same teachers? Would this cut down costs? Sharing class with Verve - as a company class?

PDL: We did this in the last project, we do lots of sharing of information with various organisations to make links like this. This can still happen sometimes but it can't happen all the time in place of regular provision as Verve need the space. The Verve dancers are part of a very expensive MA and pay to have that specific training experience in a small group. If we know someone is coming up to teach for an organisation we try and give them work too, but this still incurs additional costs for them to teach.

XX: How easy is it to get teachers to come and teach?

PDL: Very easy, this is probably easier than getting participants. We get contacted very regularly by teachers wanting to teach. This is great, but also difficult because there needs to be jobs for people in the area. And of course shows how many people need jobs in our profession and are searching for them.

XX: Is there any responsibility for the teacher to get people to classes?

PDL: Not so much because they get a fee. Teachers do have written into their contract that they must advertise their classes.

XX: Best case scenario how soon will classes start?

PDL: Probably February. But this is best case scenario.

XX: There is still a gap that is unresolved. We were running open classes, perhaps we can run class under a different name? I was thinking of running my own classes twice a month but this would not provide everything.

CG: How much would classes be without funding?

PDL: A lot. Not enough to cover a teacher fee and studio space.

XX: Is it possible to predict people's availability at certain parts of the month?

PDL: We have an external evaluator looking at this but there are so many reasons we can't really say. Depends a lot on teacher - Gaga for example always gets lots of people. (Editors note: We programme popular teachers or recommendations in the hope of gaining more attendance. Names of known teachers bring in bigger numbers. We analyse evaluation data for patterns. There aren't all that many to be found and so we get a sense from talking to people and observing the community why people don't come sometimes. I.E. jobs, auditions, other projects. Only data we know is that there are generally less people on Mondays and Fridays. But this isn't a massive difference.)

XX: As a short term solution could there be classes every other week? Sometimes people are available sometimes not. Maybe with less classes there would be more people?

PDL: Yes maybe if it's intermittent people might be more likely to come, but we tend to find a huge surge in people at the beginning of project.



XX: If people know it's every week they are maybe less likely to come.

PDL: Maybe, but we need regular training to be able to continue to be professionals. And if it's sparse then you might miss lots of opportunities to come.

GV: Look around you, there are twenty dancers in this room. Making it sustainable is going to be very difficult in the short term.

VG: The conversation has moved back to the sustainable model, but what can we do in the short term period. Improv exchange started 9 years ago as a sharing of practice. There is also the option of allowing people to lead/ share practice if they want, which could change the expectation. We have to still be careful that this does not become seen as a long term solution.

JS: We are in a culture where we have to fight for our value. I know a teacher who used to perform in the week and offer a free class on the weekend and from that get invited all over the world to teach - it's also important to cultivate a culture of generosity too. Celebrate and promote best practice as a community too.

PDL: Do you have a suggestion of how we could coordinate something like this? Through YD website again?

VG: eg: doodle poll where people put their names up on certain days/ weeks to teach.

WE: Could have an option on the website where you put your name down and it went straight onto the website?

PDL: Studio space is precious, maybe there needs to be some rules about how the space is used.

VG: Would be good to have some kind of offer to pay something - eg. pay as you feel?

GV: Might need some clarification on how it is run/ used. Eg there are still other projects perhaps under GFAs that could provide teaching as part of that.

WE: Easiest way is for there to be one forum where people put all of their information about what is already happening.

VG: There are two ideas here, one where we share what is already happening and another where there is in kind space offered to people to share practice.

TH: It would be good to have a group for this.

WE: I'm aware that there are vastly different interests across Leeds and there are already groups like this in Leeds happening.

JS: This would be short term.

ST: Feels like this is a thing that needs a co-ordinator.

PDL: From our side, at the moment our priority is to get the meeting with the Arts Council, and look at this bid. We are going to Sweden for all of November for a project and are currently in a project so don't have time to co-ordinate this ourselves. We are happy for someone else to take this over in the interim.

WE: A conversation needs to be had about what you are proposing and you can come back to us.

VG: We can talk about this now - one day a week of in kind space where people share their practice/ research.

WE: I'd be happy to explore that. We've tried a number of things over the years. If there are a core group of people who love it it will work.

VG: Yes, but it's that idea that has led to the idea that it can be done for no money. It also important that it doesn't look like it is sustainable by itself.

WE: I say this because years ago we did something like this and it fell apart in months.

PDL: It's easy to love a project when you are getting paid. This can easily die if you're not.

There is a question in our minds about the wider context. There is something going on on a wider level about structure of funding and whether artists are getting funding, and we might need to come together and think about this. If this is the case we will be talking to artists across the country and if you have any thoughts about this please email us at [marketing@prodanceleeds.com](mailto:marketing@prodanceleeds.com)

WE: There is a real desire from us to talk about this too and support this.

PDL: If you haven't said anything and you would like to please email us.

GV: If we have to use any of this as quotes please make sure people's permission is asked.

JS: This is visionary work that is crucially important to the sector. Gracefool Collective has been incredibly generous in giving this to the community.