

## LEEDS DANCE PARTNERSHIP

Ambition for Excellence  
End Point Evaluation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

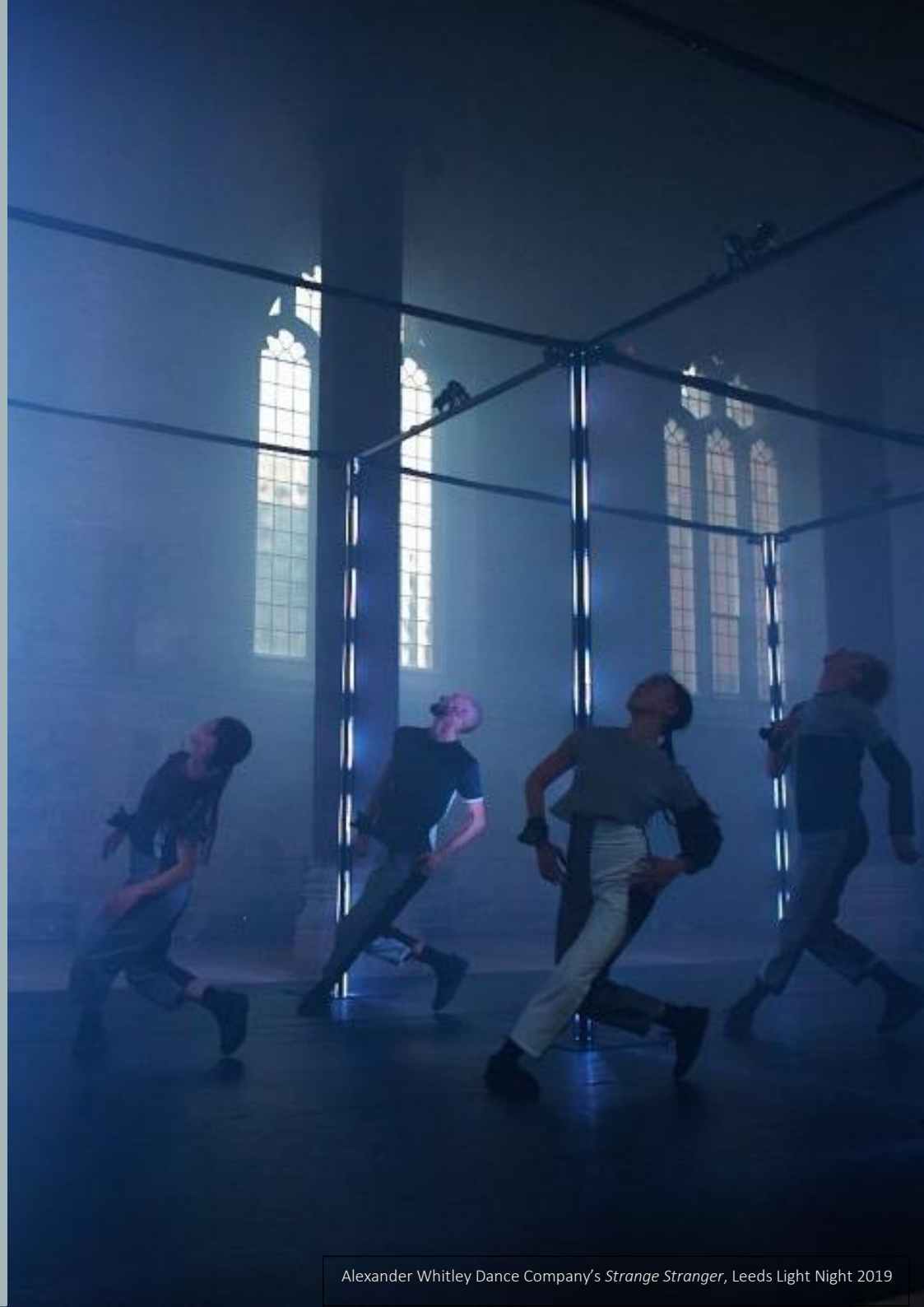
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August 24

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[www.sallyfort.com](http://www.sallyfort.com)

# Sally Fort



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## FOREWARD

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Leeds is a city of Dance. We are a rich and vibrant dance ecology in Leeds supporting dance professionals, individuals newly engaged, seasoned amateurs, diverse dance audiences, and all the communities surrounding us. As dance organisations and independent representatives, we came together in 2014 to form a shared ambition for Leeds City of Dance. So began our collective voice and in 2017 the formation of our consortium Leeds Dance Partnership.

Leeds Dance Partnership's success and high-quality programme reflects the strength of our story so far and supports our vision for the next steps. Our artists development programmes, adapting to the digital space, reaching out to new audiences, and connecting to national opportunities like BBC #DancePassion on i-player are just a glimpse of the work we've achieved to date. Through our strategic work, Leeds Dance Partnership aims to continue supporting dance talent at all levels, play our part in embedding international level culture within Leeds, and improving the dance ecology of the UK.

Our activity only happens through what we can achieve collectively. Dance in Leeds is built on the strength of the city's diversity - we will keep expanding on this to ensure all people and places are central to the decisions we make and the work we do.

All of this is only possible with the support of our wider partners in dance, Leeds City Council, Arts Council England, dance professionals and our audiences. Our thanks to all of you from Leeds, the city of Dance.

*Lucy Dasgate*

Director, Leeds Dance Partnership

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: CONTEXT

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### ABOUT LEEDS DANCE PARTNERSHIP

Leeds Dance Partnership (*LDP*) is a consortium supporting and celebrating amazing dance in Leeds and beyond, led by world-class organisations and independent dance artists based in the city: Northern Ballet (*NB*); Yorkshire Dance (*YD*); Northern School of Contemporary Dance (*NSCD*); Leeds Playhouse (*LP*); Phoenix Dance Theatre (*PDT*); Leeds Beckett University (*LBU*); and with input from an independent dance representative on the partnership board. The core aims of the partnership are to:

- Create a climate where shared visions can be realised; seek ways to support the independent dance sector; establish capital needs in the city; and advocate effectively for dance in Leeds.
- Develop the workforce of the sector to ensure that future generations of dance leaders can thrive in Leeds and the North.
- Reimagine the relationship between artists, producers, venues, and audiences, bringing these together with national developments in the future of showcasing.
- Focus on building venue capacity for programming dance and growing audiences.

### WHY LEEDS DANCE PARTNERSHIP EXISTS

Leeds has a strong, diverse dance character with long established producing and receiving companies and theatres; dedicated further and higher education facilities; a range of genres of dance catered for from classical ballet to cutting edge contemporary; development organisations; companies committed to opportunities for children and young people; dancer initiated companies, and a vibrant independent dance community.

As the nation's central organisations acknowledged their responsibility to look more equitably at relationships beyond London, and Leeds brought its cultural sector together looking towards a Capital of Culture bid, dance partners saw the importance of being able to speak collectively about the richness and potential of dance in Leeds, Yorkshire, and the North.

- In 2013 Northern Ballet; Phoenix Dance Theatre; Yorkshire Dance; DAZL; RJC; Balbir Singh; Northern School of Contemporary Dance; and Leeds Beckett University collaborated to form a partnership around the concept of Leeds City of Dance. A year later the Leeds City of Dance concept, brand and website was launched.

- 2015: Arts Council England (ACE) invited Leeds City of Dance partners and other local dance representatives to explore what a hub for the North of England in Leeds might look like. From this a steering group of Northern Ballet; Yorkshire Dance; Northern School of Contemporary Dance; Phoenix Dance Theatre and Rachel Fullegar set to work on taking the idea further. The partnership commissioned in-depth consultation across all walks of dance life to think about what Leeds as a City of Dance hub might mean. The work generated huge enthusiasm and a critical mass of expectation for the future of dance in Leeds across the city.
- 2016 : The final report was launched. The strengths of diversity of dance genres and pathways were highlighted, as was the forthcoming Capital of Culture campaign. Also identified was a threat to achieving the fullest potential, given a lack of formally joined-up approach for dance in Leeds, and the fierce competition over limited resources.
- The steering group submitted a proposal to ACE's Ambition for Excellence programme which aimed to: contribute to the development of strong cultural places; grow and develop talent and leadership across England and across artforms; give an international dimension to excellent work; create the highest quality new work, including for outdoor and festival contexts.
- The proposal originally included 6 aims: to develop pathways and excellence; increasing participation and engagement; an international facing ecology; developing people and capacity; developing places and spaces; improved profile and advocacy.
- The application was successful and major funding received. With a reduction from the initial budget proposed, the aims were streamlined and work began in earnest in 2017. The partnership's first actions were to move from a steering group into an unincorporated partnership with a leadership board, appoint a Partnership Director, clarify a new name to reflect the final streamlined programme: Leeds Dance Partnership; and articulate a four stranded strategy:
  - **Creating the Climate** – building the infrastructure of the dance sector in Leeds.
  - **Choreographer & Dancer Development** – the training and development of dancers at all levels.
  - **Research & Creation** – exploring the creation of new work by making the most of independent dancers working with organisations.
  - **Commissions & Presentation** – a joined up approach to programming and audience development for the different audiences of Leeds; and improving the opportunities for Leeds based dancers to scale up or tour their work.

Any elements removed from the original 6 aims were then moved into a longer term vision for LDP to build when it could, ready to build on in the future.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: IMPACT

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Five years ago Leeds had a vibrant dance sector with organisations and collectives doing high profile performance, production, and development work, though usually working alone, or partnering just through community and education collaborations. Programming for dance mainly took place either in small and large scale venues which limited engagement either by capacity or cost. Leeds dance was celebrated, but only for achievements by one organisation or artist at a time.

Now in 2021, looking back, the process of creating a fruitful and successful partnership has been a testament to the vision and determination of those involved. At times it has needed leaps of faith in ambition, trust, and belief. Throughout, the core partners have been committed to their shared vision of dance for, from and in Leeds receiving the recognition it deserves. As a result:

**Leeds dance now has: a stronger ecology internally and attracts more attention nationally; artists who are more business savvy, more creative, better connected, and more interdisciplinary; diversity is even more actively sought out and celebrated; and the profile of dance in Leeds is growing with new audiences outdoors, online and in theatres.**

## LDP has delivered activity with...

	<b>more than 20 external partners</b>
Investing...	<b>over 50% of funding directly back into independent dancers<sup>1</sup></b>
To create or help grow <sup>2</sup> ...	<b>over 100 events and projects</b>
With...	<b>over 600 dancers, collectives, and practitioners<sup>3</sup></b>
Reaching...	<b>audiences of c1.5m people</b>
Attracting...	<b>c13,500 people to live events funded or invested in by LDP</b>
And switching...	<b>nearly 1.5 million people on to LDP digital training and performances</b>

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<sup>1</sup> Ambition for Excellence fund: £750,000. Confirmed budget allocated to dance activity as of 31.05.21: £378,000. The true total will be higher since unconfirmed figures are excluded.

<sup>2</sup> 'help grow' – add extra opportunities for dance in or from Leeds as part of work planned by others

<sup>3</sup> Funds supported 200+ dancers, collectives, and associated practitioners to carry out, develop, explore, and share their work. 400+ additional dancers participated in LDP programme activities: workshops, interactive productions, online programmes and more

- 1. CREATING THE CULTURE: THE DANCE ECOLOGY OF LEEDS IS STRONGER:** LDP has built skills, knowledge, trust and understanding between its core partners. The partnership shows strength in its business and digital development, artist development, external partnerships, and commitment to diversity. As a result, the wider dance sector in and beyond Leeds is better connected and new national partners are already making plans to return.
- 2. CHOREOGRAPHER & DANCER DEVELOPMENT: DANCERS ARE BETTER EQUIPPED FOR A LONG CAREER:** Independent dancers have developed new skills including new fundraising knowledge, new contacts, and opportunities; new ways to work digitally; and secured additional income and commissions.
- 3. RESEARCH & CREATION: DANCERS ARE WORKING MORE BROADLY AND DEEPLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THEMSELVES; THE PEOPLE OF LEEDS; AND THE WIDER ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR:** Independent dancers have generated new lines of creative interest / expression; started to work more with other artists and artforms; identified the physical and strategic conditions needed to evolve in ways that are otherwise unavailable to them; engaged more actively and deeply with the people of Leeds and the dance sector beyond Leeds; found confidence in their instincts; and secured new income and commissions.
- 4. COMMISSIONS & PRESENTATION: THE PROFILE OF DANCE FOR AND FROM LEEDS IS BOOMING:** Leeds dance has reached new heights as LDP helped promote local dance artists to commissions in the remotest rural corners of the country; to national tours and international festivals. Within Leeds, people have joined in dance projects and stumbled upon exciting dance installations and performances on the streets, bringing new audiences to dance. People around the UK and from across the globe have been able to witness Leeds dance online and through organised international visits.
- 5. DANCE AUDIENCES IN MEDIUM SCALE THEATRES ARE GROWING:** The ripple effect of LDP is showing in the city's mid-scale theatres, where the number of dance performances and engagement activities, and the number of tickets booked for dance, have all more than doubled.
- 6. DIVERSITY IN DANCE IS IMPROVING:** LDP has put women and people with Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds front and centre of their work, from young people in Leeds communities, to emerging and established professional artists, through to programming and leadership roles. Extra efforts have been made to recruit people from these backgrounds, and tailor support to help people dig into their confidence, following instincts and ideas that are deeply buried. This remains a cross-cutting priority across all LDP's strands.





Image: Northern School of Contemporary Dance Theatre, Lucy Dusgate

# 1: CREATING THE CLIMATE

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## THE DANCE ECOLOGY OF LEEDS IS STRONGER

LDP HAS BUILT ITS SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND STRENGTHS AS A PARTNERSHIP ESPECIALLY IN AREAS RELATED TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, ARTIST DEVELOPMENT, AND COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY. THE WIDER DANCE SECTOR IN AND BEYOND LEEDS HAS BUILT NEW EXPERIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND FUTURE AMBITIONS IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING.

**COLLABORATION:** Partners have collaborated on delivery in the past prior to LDP, either across specific departments or on project-by-project work. What was new for LDP was the opportunity to learn about the fundamentals of one another's organisation at a deeper, more nuanced level over a longer period, and look at combined strategic development. Collaboration across all partners jointly and simultaneously has also been a new experience. Projects like Leeds Light Night, the Fellowships and BBC #DancePassions are good examples of breaking new ground when this happens.

**COMMITMENT:** Despite a challenging start navigating complex local, regional, and national agendas, partners have consistently committed to an active partnership. They have attended board meetings regularly, held difficult conversations, and explored shared and competing interests to deliver programmes for local dancers, audiences, and sector partners in Leeds and beyond.

**LEADERSHIP:** The chair of the LDP board has been especially praised from within the core group, acknowledging their generous and focussed support, holding a clear and open space for partners to discuss the best ways forward without being impositional or prioritising the needs of their own organisation above others.

*“That was the first time we’d ever worked with Yorkshire Dance in that way. It worked really well because there was time to make relationships and find out about each other. It was a catalyst to us working creatively together. We’re building on that. Doors are opening, opportunities are arising, relationships are being built.”*  
Kathy Williams, RJC (Unite project)

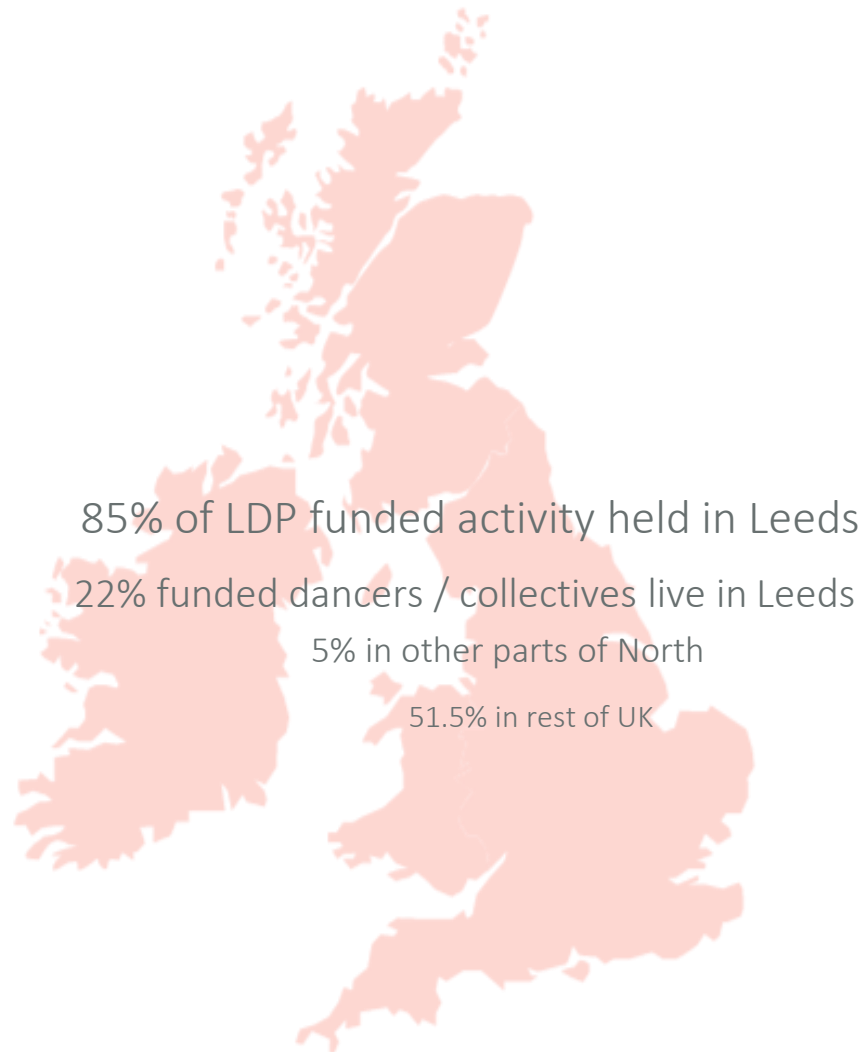
Likewise both partnership directors have been praised for their ability to shape strategy amid complicated circumstances; to hold several (sometimes conflicting) viewpoints and agendas within the partnership, achieving results and making progress in ways partner organisations feel would not have happened otherwise.

**CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT:** NSCD has begun the process for a larger vision in Chapeltown, with more opportunities to bring training and professional practice together; inspire young people in Leeds to dream bigger; send a clear message to people who are often excluded by society that they matter; and contribute to employment, social mobility, accessibility, cultural engagement and health and wellbeing. Yorkshire Dance aspires to use dance inclusively to enable active and radical change, with a strong evidence base to influence policy and artistic evolution. Their building layout has grown organically and is dominated by private hires, leaving little room for their own artistic production. Better facilities and a welcoming public social space are needed. Options appraisals are being reviewed, with the rationale for development included in their business plan. As the new leadership team at Phoenix Dance Theatre map out business plans for the next five years, they are currently exploring options within the partnership for long term accommodation, looking at how they might build their support for emerging dancers, develop a more substantial education offer, and explore new income streams.

**DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE:** Technical / digital support from Northern Ballet as the host of the partnership has been recognised for its generosity and expertise, providing equipment at short notice, ensuring digital infrastructure is available and runs smoothly, leading the way with live broadcast streaming, and influencing the inclusion of more digital and dance cross-over in performances such as Light Night commissions.

**A SHARED VOICE:** A central co-ordinated place for dance in Leeds has drawn major opportunities that would not have occurred otherwise such as BBC #DancePassions, the OneDance UK conference, the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts *Walking with Leeds* event, and contributions to Surf the Wave all excellent examples.

## LDP IS BRINGING DANCE IN AND OUT OF LEEDS REGIONALLY, NATIONALLY, AND INTERNATIONALLY



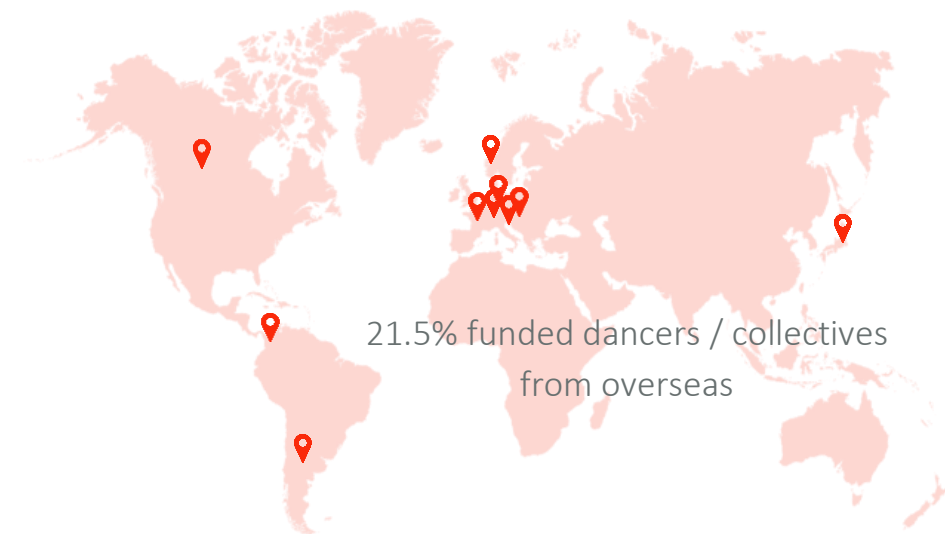
85% of LDP activities were in Leeds (15% supported Leeds artists to travel, or share online)

22% dancers / collectives funded live in Leeds

5% live elsewhere in the north of England

51.5% from other parts of the UK

21.5% international including Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, The Netherlands, USA, and Zimbabwe



## 2: CHOREOGRAPHER & DANCER DEVELOPMENT

### DANCERS ARE BETTER EQUIPPED FOR A LONG CAREER

INDEPENDENT DANCERS HAVE DEVELOPED NEW SKILLS INCLUDING NEW FUNDRAISING KNOWLEDGE, NEW CONTACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES; NEW WAYS TO WORK DIGITALLY; AND SECURED ADDITIONAL INCOME AND COMMISSIONS.

**NEW PRACTICE:** Enabling dancers to build new skills, explore practice more deeply, and provide more opportunities for them to upscale or broaden their profile has been one of LDP's best successes. The combined resources, expertise and ambition of the partners and local artists have led to more confident, better equipped, more established dancers. Intensive, deep incubation opportunities like Accelerate for new dancers; and Fellowships and CC Labs for artists at tipping points in their career have created new work, new connections, new skills, new commissions and helped dance artists realise ambitions that were buried deep within. As a result the artists involved in these programmes have been able to change gears in their career.

**AN ARTIST INSPIRED FRAMEWORK FOR LOCKDOWN SUPPORT:** With the input of Independent LDP Board Member João Maio, LDP was quick to recognise the need to support its community. Supported by strong digital infrastructure and expertise it quickly created a toolkit signposting dancers to many different kinds of support available locally and nationally; and to extend the business development training originally intended for Accelerate participants to a wider audience through online seminars. As a result, over 100 artists were able to join these workshops rather than just the 10 who would have accessed them otherwise.

**SHARING POLICY & PRACTICE:** LDP has enabled development at policy and research levels by working with its higher education partners to develop seminars, symposia, and conference discussions. Leeds Beckett University with LDP hosted One Dance UK's first conference outside of London. One Dance found LDP to be well organised, and helpful with a warm welcome. They are keen to return. LDP with NSCD and Yorkshire Dance hosted the *IRL?* Conference looking at the cross over between dance and digital culture with research, presentations, and special commissions from across Europe.

*"I got excited by what was emerging. The fellowship created scaffolding for my research which allowed me to create more clarity and apply for further funding. The major outcome has been to allow me to dare into a new area of practice with ecology from a more in-depth perspective. Directly working with woodlands, redirecting my practice to work in green spaces."*  
Vanessa Grasse (Fellowship)

*"It's been a spring-board, a launch pad, it's been fantastic. The money for marketing and research time and video footage. I have learned how to give others a strong idea of who I am, what I do, why and how I do it. That name of Accelerate has been a mark of trust and quality for funders. Although it's ended, I still feel connected."*  
Katie Hewison (Accelerate)

### 3: RESEARCH & CREATION

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#### DANCERS ARE WORKING MORE BROADLY AND DEEPLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THEIR ARTFORM; THE PEOPLE OF LEEDS; AND THE WIDER ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR

INDEPENDENT DANCERS HAVE GENERATED NEW LINES OF CREATIVE INTEREST / EXPRESSION; STARTED TO WORK MORE WITH OTHER ARTISTS AND ARTFORMS; IDENTIFY THE PHYSICAL AND STRATEGIC CONDITIONS NEEDED TO EVOLVE IN WAYS THAT ARE OTHERWISE UNAVAILABLE TO THEM; ENGAGE MORE ACTIVELY AND DEEPLY WITH THE PEOPLE OF LEEDS AND THE DANCE SECTOR BEYOND LEEDS; FIND CONFIDENCE IN THEIR INSTINCTS; AND SECURE NEW INCOME AND COMMISSIONS.

**UNIQUE SELF-DIRECTED, OPEN ENDED OPPORTUNITIES:** CC Labs, the Fellowships and Accelerate all provided unique opportunities dancers say they can't normally find, stressing the importance of self-directed open ended time and space to explore their own practice with no predetermined product expected. The inclusion of a budget for their time and CPD were also highlighted as best practice, and the transparent and equitable approach to offering opportunities via an open application process were all praised by the dance community.

**ACCESS TO STUDIO SPACE:** LDP has ensured empty spaces have been able to be used where possible, such as helping Mobius take up residence with Leeds Beckett University; creating capacity for Accelerate, CC Lab and Fellowship artists to have open ended studio time; or working with Pro Dance Leeds to hold classes in spaces throughout the city. NSCD, Yorkshire Dance and Northern Ballet offered spaces for artists throughout the programme, often far above and beyond the agreements on paper.

**SUPPORTED BY:** Supported by was LDP's most varied and prolific strand, with 53 activities planned, 102 artists supported and 21 locations involved. This strand was perhaps the most flexible, adding capacity, maximising opportunities, and supporting artists, communities, and audiences of all levels.

*"In the beginning it was just me, the dancers and ideas. Starting with music is where I feel most confident so without access to that it was great because I had to strengthen other aspects. Now that skill is a lot to do with how I work. It was a really extraordinary experience."*

*Jamaal Burkmar (CC Labs / Fellowship)*

*"The north wasn't represented enough and LDP made sure that changed. That initial input has shifted everything. After 20 years of not being allowed in the room I finally had a voice."*

*Keira Martin (Supported By)*

## 4: COMMISSIONING & PRESENTATION

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### THE PROFILE OF DANCE FOR AND FROM LEEDS IS BOOMING.

LEEDS DANCE HAS REACHED NEW HEIGHTS AS LDP HELPED PROMOTE LOCAL DANCE ARTISTS TO COMMISSIONS IN THE REMOTEST RURAL CORNERS OF THE COUNTRY; TO NATIONAL TOURS AND INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS. WITHIN LEEDS, PEOPLE HAVE JOINED IN DANCE PROJECTS AND STUMBLED UPON EXCITING DANCE INSTALLATIONS AND PERFORMANCES ON THE STREETS, BRINGING NEW AUDIENCES TO DANCE. PEOPLE AROUND THE UK AND FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WITNESS LEEDS DANCE ONLINE AND THROUGH ORGANISED INTERNATIONAL VISITS.

**PROMOTING LEEDS DANCE ARTISTS:** There were many instances of LDP backing, promoting, and enabling Leeds artists to be more seen and heard. The Supported By programme increased capacity and engagement at dance events around Leeds through 53 planned activities supporting 102 artists across 21 locations. With Surf the Wave, LDP championed artists from the North having noticed they were under-represented in events being curated. LDP helped open the door for Leeds artists and supported them financially to attend pitches and showcases. In liaison with the international IETM event, LDP commissioned a pop-up series of installations and performances around the city for the delegates to experience. For #BBCDancePassions, LDP ensured a diverse collection of dance representation in Leeds all received the same opportunities for profile, including artists from Mobius, Gracefool Collective, RJC Dance and Dazl.

**ENGAGING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN DANCE:** Unite projects successfully reached wider communities; helped change perceptions of people about younger people, older people, and teenage boys; lifted the spirits of artists, participants, and audiences alike; enhanced family relationships with very young children; and established partnerships which look set to continue.

*“From BBC #DancePassions, we were chosen as BBC’s ‘Moment of the Day’ giving a stamp of recognition to our work. We’ve had people tell us they saw us on tv and came to see us because of that clip. It’s provided a level of confidence in us from the sector that has brought other opportunities and commissions.”*  
Gracefool Collective

*“I prefer performing like this, it’s a thing for everyone else to see, if you were just shopping in town as a normal day it’s just quite an exciting thing, and normally I would see these performances and I’m quite happy to be in one now. It’s been a great experience for me, even just the atmosphere makes you feel really positive and happy”*  
Participant (Collide)

**REACHING NEW AUDIENCES:** When LDP takes to the streets it reaches audiences who are new to dance, new to contemporary dance or new to the places dance lives in Leeds. Year One of LDP's involvement with Light Night brought 7000+ people to the Quarry Hill area of the city; *Collide* performances enticed passers by to stop and enjoy the spectacle in some of the city centre's most central shopping routes. Feedback at these events consistently show people who have not witnessed live dance before are engaging and keen to see more. And the presence of LDP has helped audiences of dance in mid-scale theatres double.

*"It's good isn't it? For the community, get it out there on the streets and keep the arts alive"* Audience member (*Collide*)

*"Initially I wasn't sure it was for me. But the sheer exuberance, skill and lighting / music technology was just so good!"*  
Audience member (*Strange Stranger, Light Night*)

*"It's cool because you get people involved... it's not just for the theatre, everyone is included"*  
Audience member (*Collide*)



## 5. DANCE AUDIENCES IN MEDIUM SCALE THEATRES ARE GROWING

IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LDP, DANCE PROGRAMMED BY THE PARTNERS ACROSS LEEDS THEATRES AND STUDIOS<sup>4</sup> HAS SEEN...

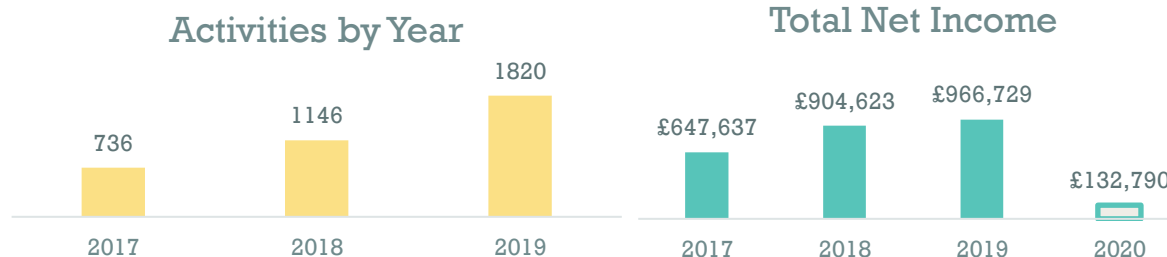
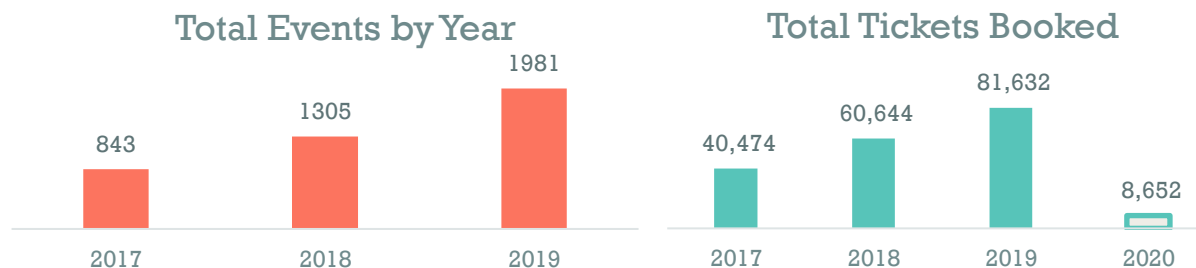
135% total increase in dance events<sup>5</sup>

147% increase in dance activities

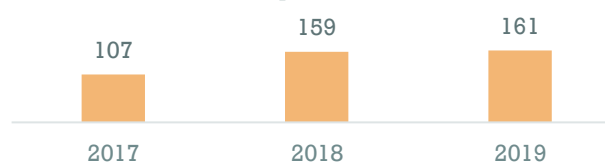
50% increase in dance productions / performances

101% increase in tickets booked (an extra c40,000 tickets)

49% increase in net income (an extra c£320,000)



### Productions / Performances by Year



<sup>4</sup> All dance events from LDP partners held in venues throughout Leeds, which were open to the public and booked via box office / ticket lines, including free events

<sup>5</sup> Events = activities (workshops, talks etc) plus productions / performances

## 6. DIVERSITY

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LDP HAS PLACED AN AUTHENTIC COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND PEOPLE FROM BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNICITY BACKGROUNDS FRONT AND CENTRE IN EVERYTHING THEY DO.

**DIVERSITY AT THE CORE:** Like many organisations, inclusion and social impact has always played a part in the histories of the partners, though recent political and civil rights activity has amplified the need to keep pushing this area of work, continue to learn, advocate, and put inclusive action front and centre of LDP's work. This has been core to their internal systems, protocol and decision making around commissioning and programming. Their efforts LDP has carried a strong, authentic commitment to diversity from the outset, championed by a diverse leadership group inclusive of differing genders, ethnicities, LGBTQ+ status, and areas of expertise. The partnership has prioritised ethnic, geographic, gender and economic equality and accessibility throughout, with targets and policies around the inclusion of women, ethnically diverse populations and artists from Leeds and Yorkshire.

**ONGOING SECTOR DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE DIVERSITY:** The partnership board has commissioned support from South Asian Arts periodically to input into their understanding and decision making. As this report is being written, the LDP board are about to embark on training in unconscious bias for the partnership and their staff. Plans for a conference exploring diversity and dance were part of the vision from early on, though practical delays to LDP, the impact of covid and the will to ensure the event does justice to the factors involved have pushed this back to 2022. However plans are gaining momentum now to hold the '*Diversity in Dance - Black Female Leadership*' conference which will open an honest dialogue about black women in these roles, by black women and to a wider audience. As an immediate next step, Sharon Watson, Director at Northern School of Contemporary Dance, is leading a round table symposia on behalf of LDP to influence the direction and content of the conference. Meanwhile the partnership is now investing in a new Black Dance Programmer placement embedded in the Leeds Playhouse programming team, bringing new expertise to the organisation, and ensuring a longer term strategic prioritisation for dance in its repertoire.

**DIVERSITY IN PRACTICE:** In all LDP programme strands, this explicit commitment to diversity has been embedded into all opportunities through recruitment, support, and monitoring approaches. For instance, the four *Fellowship* opportunities were taken up by three women and 1 mixed Black heritage man; *Accelerate's* ten participants comprised 9 women, 3 people with mixed Black heritage and 1 who self-identified as queer. The *CC Lab's* 8 choreographers and composers included 8 participants from Asian, mixed / Black Caribbean, and 'other' ethnic groups. Only 2 had English / Welsh / N Irish / British backgrounds. Artists responding to commission opportunities in the *Supported By* and *Unite* programmes were asked to provide information in their proposals about how they would include LDP's diversity priorities in their work. Responses included involving open calls to artists across the North, with a particular emphasis on Yorkshire (e.g. Collide); payment to attend collaborative workshops (e.g. Early Years Artists Exchange); special consideration given to how activity could be made accessible to women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds (e.g. Walking with Leeds), workshop content designed to help empower young women (e.g. Zsuzsa Rozavolgyi) community participation within areas of high ethnic diversity and programming international women dancers (e.g. Transform Festival).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: LEGACY

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*“LDP did something that didn’t exist before by stating the ambition to see Leeds recognised as a city of dance; and set out how the sector would collaborate to maximise the profile and benefits of dance across the city. That has our full-hearted support and we want to see it continue. Its work with Light Night and BBC #Passions are perfect examples of how LDP contributes to our aim to see Leeds as a hive of creative innovation. And it plays a very strong part in promoting Leeds as a global city which we’d be keen to see LDP raise the profile of further. We want to see LDP promoting more, raising the profile more, and driving that ambition further to make sure dance remains prominent.”*

*Pam Johnson, Head of Culture Programmes, Leeds City Council*

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Having tested the waters in collaborating to elevate the infrastructure, diversity, and quality of dance in, from and for Leeds, LDP has achieved much that could not have been done otherwise and feels their work is just beginning. They have learned about how to work together; what the city’s independent dancers need; how to bring dance organisations and communities together; how to add capacity and opportunity for international exchange in practice and policy; and how to recruit for, commission and monitor their activity. They now want to continue this and do more to boost the original concept of Leeds as a city of dance.

Each of the LDP core partners now contributes financially to the partnership and is committed to a longer future. However this alone is not enough to support more than one staff member – at best. For LDP to continue its successes and take their impact to the next level they will be reliant on strategic investment.

In the meantime they look forward to an energetic 12 months, re-opening dance in Leeds through:

#### INFRASTRUCTURE

- A new Black Dance Programmer placement, based at the Leeds Playhouse. This will build on LDP's current commitment to diversity; bring more dance knowledge into Leeds Playhouse; result in more diverse programmes for the people of Leeds; and contribute to the diversity of the dance / arts sector.
- A round table event exploring Black Female Leadership in dance, scheduled in autumn to inform a larger event in the future; led by Sharon Watson (Director, NSCD) held at NSCD.

#### DANCE IN LEEDS

- Celebrate the re-opening of the city with a Dance Open Day. This will build on its pan-partner programming, include the wider dance sector in Leeds, and bring dance to the widest possible audiences across Leeds.
- Plans for the next Leeds Light Night with collaborations, commissions, and sites ready to go as soon as the next Light Night event is confirmed.
- Small seed funding commissions working towards strategic moments and campaigns for the city, such as a pitching session with Leeds 2023.

#### ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

- Offer a flexible free development platform for the dance sector locally and beyond with *Making Dance Work* seminars and networking sessions; held monthly over 6 months in person at Yorkshire Dance and live streamed online. Topics will include marketing, funding, working with film / digital, outdoor festivals and discussion with guest artists.
- Support Pro Dance Leeds in continuing its dance class series for independent dancers and exploring its long term sustainability.

#### PARTNERSHIP

- Small scale seed funding support for independents and smaller organisations.
- Support for RJC in fundraising and returning to their base.
- More BBC collaborations including a new #DancePassions event which will once again work with LDP as a core partner.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: LEARNING

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LDP RECOGNISES IT WAS AMBITIOUS FROM THE OUTSET. SOME OF THESE AMBITIONS ARE YET TO BE FULLY REALISED AND THE PARTNERS KNOW THEY CAN DO MORE, ESPECIALLY IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

**1. Expanding a shared ownership by Leeds:** LDP has achieved some amazing successes, but not enough people outside the partnership know about them. Pressures on LDP to achieve the ambition it set out to realise has meant much of the exploration, experimentation and delivery has come from within the core partnership group. LDP is reliant on the rest of the dance world of Leeds to achieve the maximum potential strength of the partnership, profile of dance in Leeds, and a shared, collective ownership of LDP for the city. It has to look outwards from the core partnership more to do this. LDP knows there is more to be done so that the wider city, from independent dancers to collectives, community programmes and the rest of the local cultural sector fully understand LDP's purpose, and can take shared ownership in the one co-ordinated voice for dance in the city. Keeping the concept alive of Leeds as a city of dance will be central to securing this shared ownership.

**2. Capital Scoping:** LDP was tasked with the challenge to map the needs of the local dance world through its buildings and present a clear, cohesive overview of how the city's needs could be formulated. Many of the partners are already in different stages of their own plans and appraisal options. Each partner has a different role in the city. Their capital plans articulate this through separate, distinct ideas and business models. It is precisely the rich and nuanced ecology of dance in Leeds that prevents LDP partners being able to reach one clear, shared conclusion. What LDP is better placed to advise on, is how each of the different capital development interests work together to ensure there is no duplication and that each supports the cohesive development of dance for the city. The independent dance sector's need for space further feeds into this ecology and should be part of the capital development overview.

**3. More resources need to be given to communications:** Following on from the above learning; LDP also needs to share its successes, processes and vision more clearly, more often, across more channels. The website is an excellent vehicle for this. Lockdown has had a major impact on all areas of LDP but online audiences and engagement has been growing especially for independent dancers. At other levels of the sector, the website alone isn't enough. LDP needs to ensure local networks are in the loop about its work. Social media will help, and needs to be carefully reviewed since use of

digital platforms has changed dramatically in the past 3-5 years. Usage is higher, popularity of different platforms changes more quickly, and more intelligence about the usage of platforms by different type of people is available. LDP has had the support of a Marketing & Comms working group though limitations on their capacity means the local sector have not been as informed as they would like.

**4. Joined up data sharing has been difficult.** With an emphasis on agreeing a clear strategy and realising the delivery needed to achieve it, less priority has been given to agreeing the processes for data sharing. In some instances high quality in-depth evaluation has taken place. In others, reports have been brief and subjective. Although evaluation is a condition of receiving the final instalment of commissions, what this evaluation consisted of was left up to each different company or artist, making overarching analysis difficult. Aware of this gap, LDP set to work creating a theory of change and a concise project report template for each piece of work it invests in. Likewise finding consistent market research data across all the partners and venues that can be aligned to LDP's aims also needs more focus. Understanding the implications of GDPR around the time of LDP's start-up, early strategic delays, and more recently the arrival of covid, have all made shared marketing and data collection more complicated. To address this LDP now has some research into its audiences and is in the process of identifying a strategy around this going forward so it can make the most of marketing and communications resources; make the case for the impact of LDP in Leeds and across the dance sector; and keep identifying where improvements can be made.

**5. Agreeing fundraising priorities has been complicated.** With six partners in the same city and same artform (albeit different genres, markets, and audiences), and a limited number of funding streams available, inevitably finding shared fundraising priorities takes time. LDP is continually balancing the funding needs of the collective work with the business models of their own institutions. This is improving; the more LDP looks to pan-partnership work and fully harnesses the opportunities beyond the sum of its parts, the more funding possibilities will become clearer.



Image: Northern School of Contemporary Dance Theatre, Lucy Dusgate

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RECOMMENDATIONS

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THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE PRESENTED AS AN INVITATION FOR THE LDP BOARD TO CONSIDER. THEY ARE EVIDENCED BASED AND AS HAPPENS WITH EVALUATION, ARE 'IDEAL WORLD' SOLUTIONS. THE LDP BOARD WILL ADD THEIR OWN 'REAL WORLD' LENS WHEN CONSIDERING WHICH TO EXPLORE DEVELOPING. THE BOARD SHOULD ALSO ADD TO THIS LIST, AREAS OF SUCCESS SO FAR IT WANTS TO CONTINUE OR ELEVATE AS PART OF ITS NEXT SET OF STRATEGIC PLANS OR IF CREATING A NEW THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE NEXT ITERATION OF LEEDS DANCE PARTNERSHIP.

### 1. CREATING THE CLIMATE

#### 1.1 Continue the partnership.

LDP can achieve more than the sum of its parts and bring new opportunities to Leeds. Partners and external stakeholders agree it should continue. To do so, it will need more investment.

#### 1.2 Maximise LDP's ability to speak as one with a co-ordinated voice.

Ensure the full diversity of dance partners in Leeds are represented in LDP's delivery, decision making processes, or both, to work smarter, support greater inclusion and diversity, open new pathways into dance, broaden the pool of dancers being supported, and continue attracting the highest profile opportunities for the city. This also includes ensuring any new partners also commit to systems such as data sharing.

#### 1.3 Improve external communications.

Clarify LDP's unique position in the dance sector, i.e. as a centralised voice supporting high quality dance coming to Leeds and from Leeds, at national and international levels, via the collaborations between high profile dance companies and the innovative independent dance professionals in the city. Raise awareness of the good work LDP *IS* doing, as people outside the partnership often don't know it's happening (especially within the Leeds cultural sectors). Review and update online and social media channels. Aim to produce annual reports.

#### 1.4 Improve data collection for the partnership

Create a culture change in collective data gathering. Establish a monitoring and reporting framework to document LDP's work in appropriate, systematic, comparable ways. Give more importance to collecting demographic data. This is essential for smarter audience development, fundraising, advocacy, and diversity. Monitoring should include all areas of diversity and protected characteristics, even if some have greater priority in LDP's work than others. Not only to evidence success, but also identify any gaps in engagement or support. The audience development research has created a useful baseline to assess the impact of LDP on audiences and programming for the city. LDP needs to consolidate its approach to GDPR, ensure partners share a collegiate commitment to this, and revisit the data annually so that a more co-ordinated audience development effort can be realised.



### **1.5 LDP's role in capital development should be as the keepers of the Leeds-wide dance ecology overview**

LDP can have a clearer role as a strategic and advocacy voice in the relationships between buildings and dance in the city. With competing demands on limited resources, LDP's most useful role in this capital scoping, is to keep the overview, ensuring developments meet the strategic vision for dance coming to, happening in, and coming from Leeds so that it can continue to speak with one voice about the holistic picture of the dance ecology in Leeds.

### **1.6 Identify a strategy for environmental activity and impact.**

It is unclear whether environmental responsibility is so embedded in the work and resources of the partners that it is overlooked; or whether it hasn't been addressed as a need before now. If it is completely embedded then more needs to be done to reference this in LDP's communications. If it is a gap in strategy it should be explored and suitable priorities, actions, monitoring, and reporting systems created.

## **2. CHOREOGRAPHER & DANCER DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 Create a clear strategy for supporting independent dance artists in their first 5-10 years after graduation.**

Build a sustainable ecosystem where new dancers can continue to practice their skills, develop their quality and ambition, and be ready to feed back into the infrastructure of Leeds once they are a fully established dance professional. An ongoing programme of dance classes and masterclasses for practitioners who have completed training / graduation but not yet established a thriving professional career. There have been some developments towards this way of working through LDP and the independent dance sector. LDP needs to keep championing this and find more ways to actively support professional development for dancers at this level.

### **2.2 Develop a more transparent offer for dancers at all levels.**

Independent dancers want to better understand how decisions are made; and how to get a foot in the door for those not already on the radar of the city's large dance organisations. Keep opening the doors to new dancers at all levels through open and transparent commissions, recruitment, pitches, and other opportunities to receive support. Where this way of working has occurred, it has been recognised and praised by independent dancers.

## **3. RESEARCH & CREATION**

### **3.1 Prioritise the continuation of open-ended, long term time and space to develop new areas of practice.**

Creative expression, interest, skills, and collaboration without the pressure of a finished product has made a significant difference to the quality and success of the artists supported. Artists commented that there is nowhere else they can access this opportunity.

### 3.2 Include larger numbers of artists in this strand.

This might include opportunities for this style of research and development for collectives as well as individuals – or be more explicit that they can apply for opportunities where that is the case. Clarify explicitly that training / development budgets are flexible and can be used to bring in other dancers if collaboration is needed. Continue the *Accelerate* programme annually (covid allowing; the digital sessions were excellent for some aspects, but cannot replace the face to face work and access to physical spaces).

## 4. COMMISSIONING & PRESENTATION

### 4.1 Widen the net for dancers being commissioned / supported.

Ensure LDP continues to champion diversity by actively looking for ways to support dancers it has not worked with before. Particularly when it comes to commissioning (less so talent development programmes which were filled by applications in response to open call outs). Inevitably recommendation needs to come from somewhere but the routes for this could be broader. Artists who have been commissioned can be asked to provide a list of names of other artists they recommend; guest artists leading classes and masterclasses can be asked to highlight participants they notice; local dance organisations of all sizes can be asked for their recommendations – and so on.

### 4.2 Add a 'dance for dancers' performance programming strand.

Bring the best international cutting edge artists to Leeds spaces to help inspire Leeds dancers in their own practice, build new contacts, and help them keep innovating. The *Supported By* strand has gone part way towards this, but a more explicit ongoing commitment to bring cutting edge national and international soloists or small collectives to Leeds, specifically for dance graduates and professionals, would help build the local infrastructure. This would also support recommendation 2.1 as part of the development offer for post-training career building dance professionals.

### 4.3. Create more cross-partnership programming

Some of LDP's best successes have been where all partners work together to produce something unique. It is not the easiest way to programme, and needs trust, patience and understanding but it does bring high profile results, inspire innovation, and truly demonstrate an LDP niche. Light Night and #DancePassions are two such examples. To be clear this is not about finding a lowest common denominator – but the opposite – finding opportunities where each partner plays to their unique strengths to bring the best of what they do in ways that complement one another.

Leeds Dance Partnership team: Leeds Dance Partnership is grateful to the members of the Partnership Board who contributed so much time to the success of the partnership and to those that worked for the partnership, and ensured the exceptional outcomes, including, Shirley Lundstram, Partnership Director from 2017 to 2020, Lucy Dugate Partnership Director 2021, and Simone Waller, Callum Holt, Jenny Sullivan, Emily Snow, Niamh Bryson, Laura Griffiths.



Image: Phoenix Dance Theatre, Lucy Dugate



Image: Northern School of Contemporary Dance Theatre, Lucy Dugate