

# LEADERSHIP GENDER BALANCE IN UK DANCE SECTOR REPORT

29th March 2023



**Awa**  
DANCE

ADVANCING  
WOMEN'S  
ASPIRATIONS  
WITH  
DANCE

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**"Men in dance are given a pedestal that women can't reach."**

**"Juggling childcare with freelance work is incredibly hard, you just don't have the capacity to drop everything and go. There is a feeling that you become less reliable when you have children and a lot of work spaces are not supportive if your child is unwell or your childcare has fallen through. I have definitely felt this."**

**Boys/men are always treated as special in dance, giving them the confidence in their own ability. Girls/women are often treated as a disposable commodity as there are so many competing for opportunities.**

# Executive Summary

The charity AWA DANCE in collaboration with Coventry University's Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE) embarked on a research project exploring leadership in the UK dance sector, concentrating on gender balance in artistic, executive and board positions. In this medium-scale research, we focused on nationally funded dance organisations across the UK for the financial period 2021-22. A second stage of the research gathered the lived experiences of women in the UK dance sector. 176 responses were collected from across the UK, allowing us to gather subjective perspectives and evidence of the leadership experience of women in dance. This research was born out of a need to understand if the subjective experiences of women in dance matched the reality in the sector. Our approach was first to analyse the regularly funded organisations operating in the sector and, second, to capture the voices of women in dance to understand their perspectives and hear their stories.

## **This research was developed in two stages between October 2022 and March 2023**

The first stage of research gathered quantitative, statistical data concerning gender in top leadership positions in all regularly funded dance organisations, for which only public data was gathered. The second stage involved a mixed-methods survey aimed at gathering the lived experiences of women working in the UK dance sector, focused on perceptions of gender and leadership.

## **Key Findings**


The data gathered on the leadership landscape of nationally funded dance organisations show that there are more women in leadership positions than men (for the financial period 2021-22). This information is in direct contrast to the perceptions of leadership women have in the UK dance sector. These are the results in the combined data (for England, Scotland and Wales):

Artistic Director positions: 56% Women – 44% Men  
Executive Director positions: 67.4% Women – 32.6% Men  
Board member positions: 61.1% Women – 38.6% Men

2) When looking further into funding bands, the data shows organisations receiving greater funding are more often led by men than women, in both artistic and executive director positions. Of the most financially powerful organisations (those that are assumed to have greater impact on the sector) the majority are led by men, with those led by women receiving less funding from national funding programmes.

3) The lived experience survey has shown that 79.7% women in the UK dance sector perceive an imbalance in leadership (16.4% are not sure, and 4% say they don't believe there is an imbalance) with the main reasons they identify for this imbalance being:

Patriarchal set up of UK society  
Maternity and motherhood  
Lack of supported infrastructures within organisations



There are a multitude of examples gathered that justify women's perspectives and views on why this imbalance is perceived, demonstrating a need to dig deeper into this issue, taking into consideration the lived experiences of women.

These findings point to three elements to be considered in future research, to gain a better understanding and more comprehensive picture of gender balance in the UK dance sector:

- 1) A need to explore proportional representation in the UK dance sector, linked to gender in leadership positions
- 2) The importance of collecting quantitative data and qualitative data (mixed methods) to tackle the complexity of and dig deeper into this
- 3) An eagerness to transform organisational cultures to support women in their leadership journeys and create a healthier and less biased workplace

### **Key Recommendations**

The data collected in this research shows that on one hand the UK dance sector is moving in an equitable direction, but on the other hand there is a noticeable negative correlation between what the numbers reveal and the lived experiences of women. This suggests that there is a disconnect which needs attention. At the end of the document, we propose a series of actions to start addressing this disconnect on both the micro and macro scales: from engaging in schemes to specifically address gender inequity and training for gatekeepers and interviewers around gender bias, to interventions giving opportunities for women to practice leadership in order to develop their leadership confidence, and to encourage organisations (and their leaders) to shift their understanding of what leadership can look like.

### **Data collection and verification**

This required a strong communication strategy to reach companies and individuals across the UK. The team would like to thank the 70 companies (out of 82) who verified the data and all survey respondents who demonstrated a commitment to equity through their participation. Special gratitude goes to our research focus group for their questions and insights, and to the Dance Data Project for leading the way and supporting us on our journey.



## Words from the Director

Since 2009 the UK dance sector has been raising questions about the lack of women in top positions in dance (from leadership positions to artistic ones including choreographers). From articles in national press<sup>1</sup>, to one-off initiatives like the Bench program<sup>2</sup> or some dispersed panel discussions on the subject at national conferences<sup>3</sup> awareness of the problem has been raised. All these actions have always been made without any data that could back up or challenge the reality of the sector and the actual experiences of professional women in dance.

We are dealing here with invisible data<sup>4</sup>, which, as the United Nations recognises, is astonishingly lacking in anything that relates to women and girls. At AWA DANCE, alongside C-DaRE (Coventry University), we believe that knowledge is power, and providing a better understanding of what the UK dance sector looks like in terms of gender distribution is the way for change to happen and strategies for equity to develop. We need to invest in, and increase, the collection of gender data in general but particularly for the UK dance sector, in order to create a workforce that is truly included, heard and valued, and where organisations become accountable for, and proactive in, achieving equity.

This report is an invitation to listen, support, centre and value the voices of women, in order to develop a collective response, where both individuals and organisations can work together to promote a leadership style that allows all the entire workforce (women and men) to thrive, acknowledging the specific needs of women in dance.



Avatâra Ayuso

Founder & Director AWA DANCE



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/oct/27/where-are-the-female-choreographers>

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/apr/28/women-choreographers-glass-ceiling>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pdsw.org.uk/news/the-bench-2018-2021-commission/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.onedanceuk.org/resource/where-are-the-female-choreographers/>

<sup>4</sup> UN Women (2023) 'Better Gender Statistics for SDGs: Evidence-Based Localization'

# Introduction

AWA DANCE (Advancing Women's Aspirations with Dance) is a CIO based in the UK, founded by the choreographer Avatâra Ayuso. We are dedicated to the leadership development of girls aged 12-18 years old and women 19+ using the transformative capability of dance as a tool to empower their voices. AWA DANCE sits at the intersection of three areas: Dance + Leadership + Women & Girls issues. We produce change by offering our participants leadership development, and through research and advocacy. We are committed to gender equality, intersectional feminism and our DANCE values (Dream big, take Action, Navigate the world, Create an artistic and leadership voice, and Empower others). These commitments lead our actions, activities and partnerships.

AWA DANCE has embarked on its first research project to explore the UK leadership landscape in the dance sector, concentrating on gender balance in artistic, executive and board positions. In a previous small-scale, desk-based mapping exercise carried out by Kathryn Stamp in November 2020 (as AWA DANCE's Impact and Communications Officer at the time) we learned that there is a gap in the knowledge and understanding about women in dance leadership positions. Discussions concerning the development of this particular research project had been ongoing since July 2021, when the researchers first met to address issues in the sector and the possibility of research in this field. With this background information, AWA DANCE decided to carry out a medium-scale study that ran from October 2022 until March 2023. By undertaking this research, we want to offer to the UK dance sector an opportunity to stop, reflect and make adjustments, and to consider more equitable working conditions which are more balanced and actively support women in leadership.

The project set out the following aims:

- To map the UK dance leadership landscape
- To create better opportunities to empower women and teenage girls
- To gather evidence on the perspectives of women in the dance sector
- To encourage transformative thinking, to enable progression and to find collective ways forward

## Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Research Tool Design	October 2022
First analysis of gathered data	December 2022
Meeting with Research Focus Group	January 2023
Verification of quantitative data	February 2023
Launch of survey on lived experiences	February 2023
Analysis and Final report	March 2023
Public in-person presentation	29th March 2023
Online presentation	3rd April 2023

# Methodology

The **first stage** of research gathered quantitative, statistical data concerning gender in top leadership positions in regularly funded dance organisations. Data collection focused only on regularly funded Dance organisations in England, Scotland and Wales<sup>5</sup>, during the financial period 2021-22. This was due to being able to access public data provided through the reporting mechanisms of these funding modals, as organisations have to supply this data to their respective Arts Councils. Data was collected for the 82 regularly funded organisations regarding the gender of their top leadership roles, both artistic and executive, and their board members. These were all organisations who specified Dance as their primary artform<sup>6</sup>.

The **second stage** involved a mixed-methods survey aimed at gathering the lived experiences of women working in the UK dance sector, focused on experiences of gender and leadership. This data was collected via a public online survey during February and March 2023, targeted towards professional women in the UK dance sector. By 23rd March 2023 176 responses were captured. We plan to leave the survey open to ensure that women can continue to contribute. For future iterations we will draw on the total number of responses received to date. The survey can be accessed [here](#).

- **Pronouns:** we have been referring to the pronouns used from the different data sources, such as biographies that are publicly available
- **Sources:** Charity Commission, Companies House, company websites, press releases and publicly available information, such as grey literature
- **Parameters:** senior leadership roles (AD, ED and CEO) and board members identified for each organisation from the 2021-2022 financial year (April-March), although language is varied
- **Weekly team meetings** were held to monitor progress and crosscheck information, working with ethical awareness to ensure data is kept within the team, understanding that data can be misused, misconstrued or misinterpreted without verification
- **Verification process** offered to each individual company with questions answered and clarifications provided where needed
- **A focus/advisory group** was also assembled to support the processing of the data. This group met between the two stages of research to consider the research process so far and to consider the statistical data, helping to inform the second stage of data collection

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<sup>5</sup> Arts Council for Northern Ireland have an annual funding scheme, which makes it difficult to combine with and compare to the other devolved nation data, which is funded over three years. More detail: <http://artscouncil-ni.org/funding/scheme/annual-funding-programme>

<sup>6</sup> However, The Royal Ballet was identified as an important company to include for the data collection, but it is part of the The Royal Opera House (ROH) so not identified as primarily Dance. Therefore, the company was added as an additional dance company, using ROH data, scaled down using information gathered from company sources to determine spread of funding and leadership positions.

## Ethics protocol

To carry out the above, we needed to explore and develop an ethical process that allowed us to manage the data and put in place a framework that is robust and aligns with GDPR. The framework ensured we can make the data and resources available to the dance sector. The nuts and bolts of that work included consulting previous dance projects that looked at ethical protocols in relation to equity, and developing ethical project information sheets and consent forms to be used during the various stages of the project. Although the duration of the project was short, the research is expansive and therefore we ensured we worked in a robust fashion which allowed the findings to be gathered through dialogue, analysed and presented. Transparency and care was honoured at every step of the way and the research team maintained the highest level of rigour at every juncture of the project. The ethical protocols that have been established and tested in this project will now underpin the charity's research strand going forward.

## Definitions and terminology

- **GENDER:** A spectrum of identities socially constructed through varying roles, behaviours and expressions
- **SEX:** Groupings of physiological characteristics that can be categorised as male, female or intersex
- **AD:** Artistic Director, executive of the organisation in charge of the creative direction
- **CEO:** Chief Executive Officer, founder, executive director, operational officer
- **NPO:** National Portfolio Organisation which receives regular core funding from Arts Council England for 3 years or more. NPOs include a variety of organisations from dance companies and dance agencies, to theatres and sector support organisations
- **RFO:** Regularly Funded Organisation which receives regular core funding from Creative Scotland. RFOs include a variety of organisations from dance companies and dance agencies, to theatres and sector support organisations
- **APW:** Arts Portfolio Wales is regular core funding from the Arts Council of Wales allocated to a range of organisations from dance companies and dance agencies, to theatres and sector support organisations
- **BOARD:** An executive committee supervising the activities of an organisation (artistic and/or legal), who collectively volunteer (most of the time) to be responsible for and govern the charity or organisation.

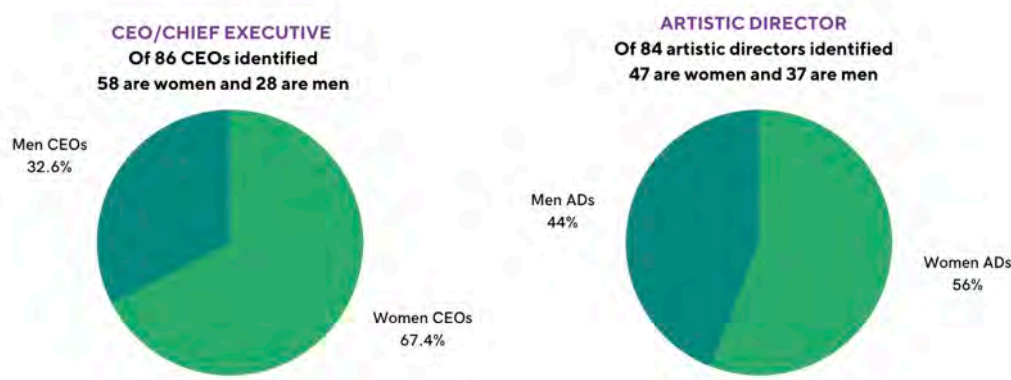


## Stage I: Company Data

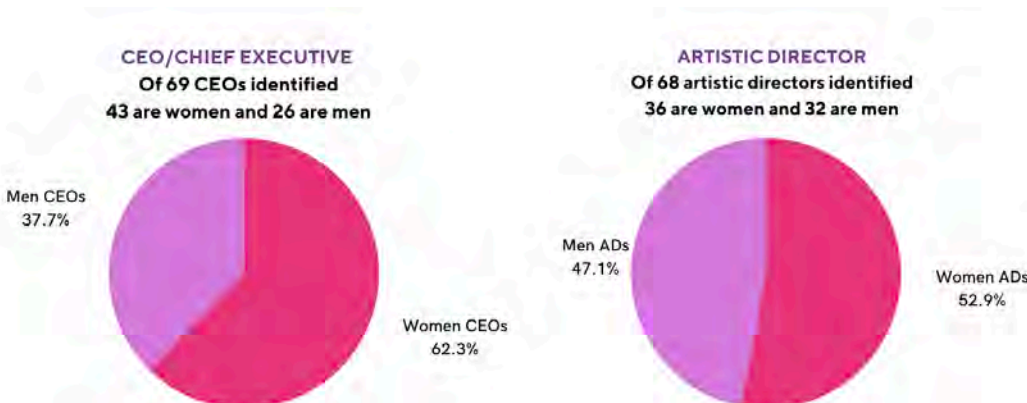
This section summarises the gender data collected for Artistic and Executive leadership positions, and board members in all regularly funded organisations. It also considers geographic spread, the funding levels of the organisations and whether the organisation's leaders were founders, or appointed. All 82 companies were offered the chance to verify the collected data, with 70 organisations responding. When a company had individuals doing a job-share both persons have been counted. When there was a change during the financial period 2021-22, only the first person was counted as they would likely have had the most influence for that period.

### Leadership roles

Beginning with the leadership data for all organisations across England, Scotland and Wales, women made up the majority of both Artistic Director (56%) and CEO (67.4%) positions<sup>7</sup>.



### English NPOs (65 identified)

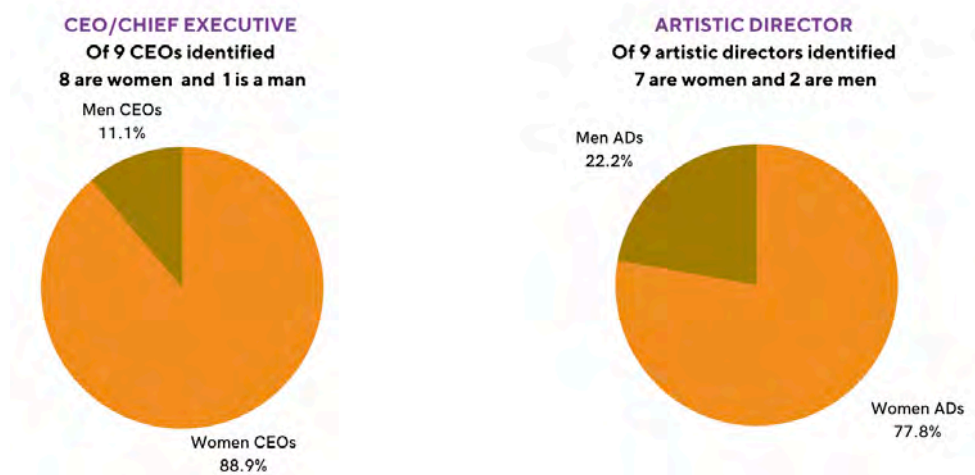


England has the highest rate of job-share positions and joint leadership roles.

<sup>7</sup> This data was collected towards the end of a three-year funding scheme. These schemes appear to have diversity expectations from organisations in receipt of the funding. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that the organisations would have been working to reach particular equality and diversity goals during this 3-year period.

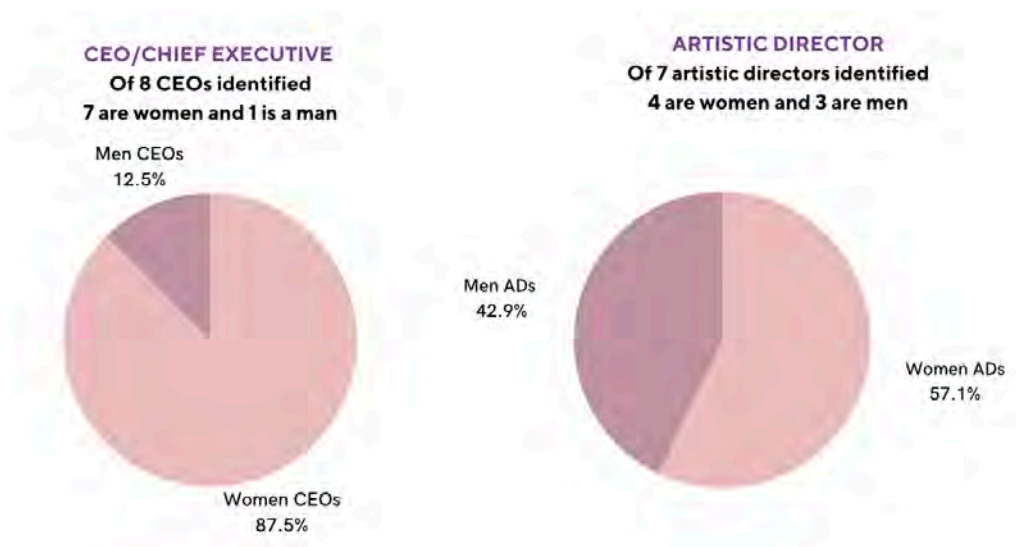
## Scottish RFOs (9 identified)

Scotland had the highest percentages of women in leadership positions, across both AD and CEO categories.



## Welsh APWs (8 identified)

Of 8 CEOs identified, 7 were women (87.5%) and 1 a man (12.5%). There were 9 Artistic Directors identified, 5 of whom were women (55.6%) and the other 4 were men (44.4%).

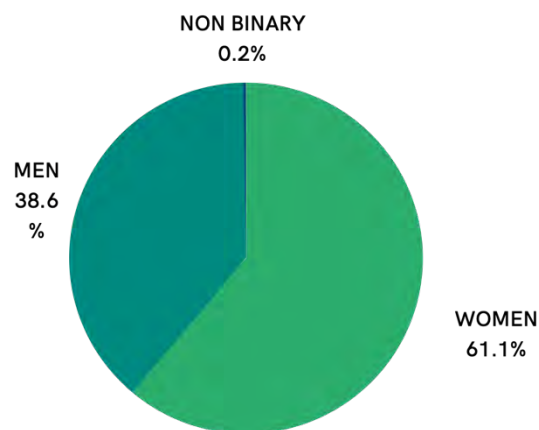


It is important to note the difference in language used for each leadership role. We have focused on artistic and executive leadership positions, and for some organisations they had job-shared positions in those roles, or joint leadership roles that covered both artistic and executive leadership. Given the scope of this research, we have not yet considered working hours of each role or the full-time equivalence (FTE).

## Board members

The second aspect of company leadership that was explored was board members. Board members act as a governing body and depending on the type of organisation (charity, educational, company) they will be responsible for overseeing financial, strategic and/or artistic decisions. Across all 3 nations (England, Scotland and Wales) there were 617 board members identified. The majority of these were women (61.1%), with 238 men (38.6%) and 1 non-binary (0.2%), 0.1% not applicable (a corporate trustee).

- Scotland has the highest percentage of women in board positions, making up 71.8%
- England and Wales have a similar spread across their boards, with approximately 60% women and 40% men in board positions



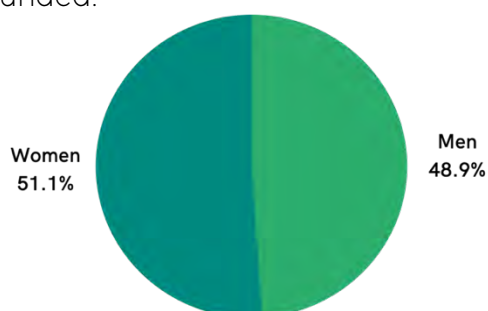
## Founder or appointed?

Out of the 82 dance organisations identified in the UK:

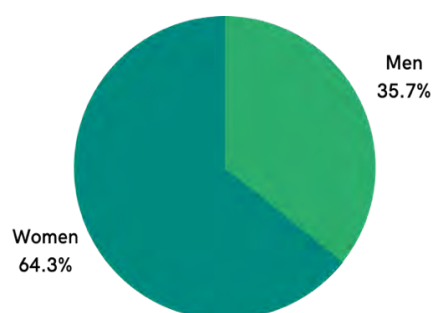
- 43 are led by founders
- 39 are led by those who were appointed

Of those who founded their own organisations or companies, 51.1% were women and 48.9% were men. Of those who were appointed to their leadership position, 64.3% were women, with 35.7% being men.

Founded:



Appointed:



## Funding Bands

In order to consider how funding is spread across different organisations, and how this intersects with gender, we looked at the different funding bands for the selected organisations. This indicates the distribution of financial power in the sector. The funding bands used are taken from Arts Council England's categorisation<sup>8</sup> (but applied to all 3 nations):

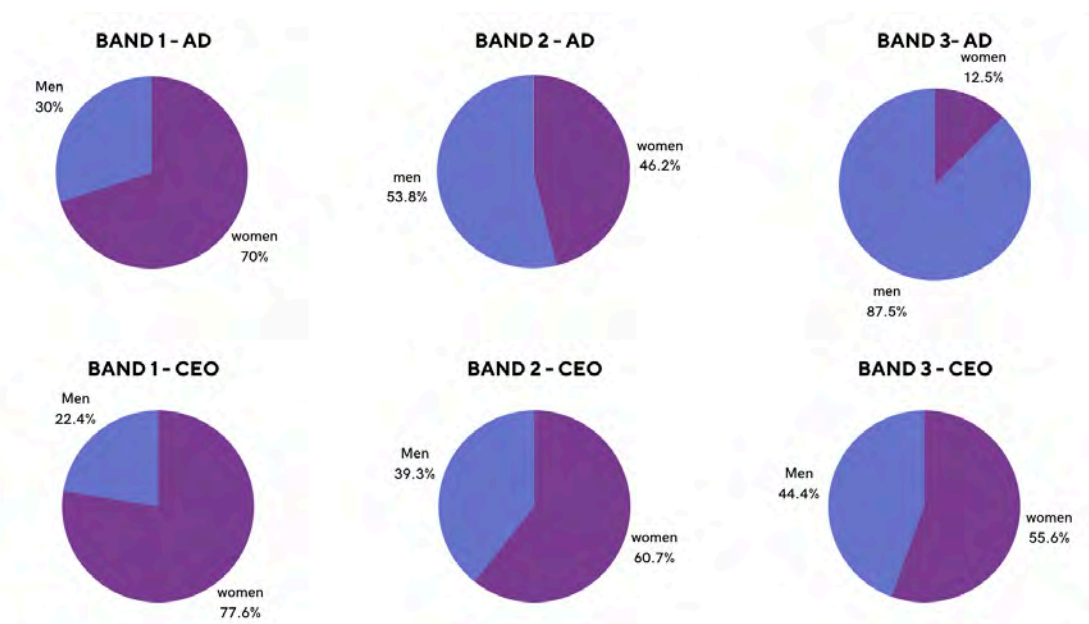
<sup>8</sup> Arts Council England 'Relationship framework: How Arts Council England works with National Portfolio Organisations'.  
<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/npo/npo-2018-22-helpful-documents>

- BAND 1: £40,000 - £249,999
- BAND 2: £250,000 - £999,999
- BAND 3: £1,000,000 and above

Of the 46 organisations in Band 1, there were 50 Artistic Directors and 49 CEOs. Women make up the majority for both AD and CEO positions. There were 35 (70%) women and 15 men (30%) as ADs. Women occupied 38 CEO positions (70%) and men occupied 11 (30%).

Of the 28 organisations in Band 2, there were 26 Artistic Directors and 28 CEOs. There were 12 women (46.2%) and 14 men as ADs (53.8%). For CEO positions, there were 17 women (60.7%) and 11 men in these positions (39.3%).

Of the 8 organisations in Band 3, there were 8 Artistic Directors and 9 CEOs. 7 Artistic Directors were men (87.5%), with only 1 woman (12.5%). In terms of CEO positions (9), 4 were men (44.41%) and 5 were women (55.6%).



This graphic shows that the Band 1 organisations (£40,000 - £249,999) are led mainly by women, but progressively as we approach band 3 men are more predominantly leaders of organisations which receive more funding.

It is interesting to note that where a joint leadership format exists (where two people job-share a role) this seems to be a more prominent leadership structure for women:

8 organisations job-share AD, and for 6 of them the role is shared among women

6 organisations job-share CEO, and for 4 of them the role is shared among women



## Stage II: Women's Lived Experience

In reaction to the public data gathered in Stage 1, we decided to conduct a public survey which launched on 7th February 2023, inviting women from the UK Dance Sector to participate within this wider project. We called this the Women's Lived Experience [survey](#).

It was deemed that public data in the first stage of this project did not reflect the lived experience of the wider communities we are connected to in the sector. This was intriguing and it felt necessary to hear the voices of those presenting as women in the sector as we questioned 'why is an imbalance perceived if the data shows otherwise?'.

This primary research consisted of 20 questions, combining multiple choice and open answers. Five of these questions would directly feed into the wider research project, two of these were for GDPR compliance and 13 formed part of Equality and Diversity monitoring. As of the 23rd March 2023, we have received a total of 176 anonymous submissions through an online survey distributed digitally via AWA DANCE's social platforms and mailing lists in addition to public resharing.

This section will present the comparable data with the use of graphs, discuss how we have categorised the open-ended questions and identify the demographics and protected characteristics of women who contributed to Stage 2 of this project.

### Who responded?

Of the 176 people who responded (as of 23rd March 2023):

- The majority were 30-44 years old (43.9%), followed by both 18-29 and 45-59 year olds (25% each), with respondents aged 60+ years old at 6.1%
- The majority were White British (64.6% ), the rest from the following ethnic backgrounds:

▼ White British	64.63%	106
▼ Any other White	18.29%	30
▼ Mixed race/Dual Heritage	4.88%	8
▼ Any other not listed? (please specify)	3.05%	5
▼ Asian British (East, South East and South Asian)	2.44%	4
▼ Prefer not to say	2.44%	4
▼ Black British	1.22%	2
▼ Asian (East, South East and South Asian)	1.22%	2
▼ Hispanic or Latino	1.22%	2
▼ Black or African American	0.61%	1

- Over 90% of respondents identified with the gender they were assigned at birth
- 16 respondents identified as having a disability
- There was a wide geographical spread, with respondents from 50 counties across England, Scotland and Wales
- The respondents' professional practice covered a vast range of roles. The top 5 were: teacher (48.3%), dancer (41.5%), choreographer (36.9%), producer (19.3%) and community practitioner (18.2%). Other roles/practice included activist, movement director, dance movement psychotherapist, consultant and project manager, to name only a few
- 140 respondents (80%) said that they held leadership responsibilities in their professional practice (a position where you have to hold a space for people and can make some decisions that affect your community, company, organisation, department, business, etc)

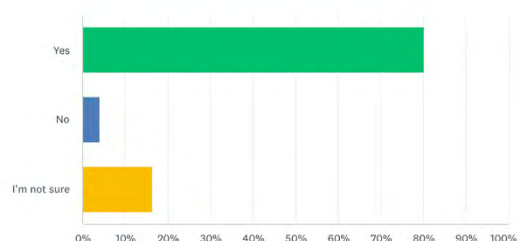
## What did they say?

The Women's Lived Experience survey asked the respondents questions concerning many aspects of their life and career as a woman in the dance sector. Most questions were multiple choice format, making data and comparisons easily identifiable. However, we also invited women completing the survey to reflect on and share their individual, lived experiences by providing a platform to express themselves and use their voice.

One of the opening questions in the survey asked 'Do you think there is a gender imbalance in leadership in the UK dance sector?', with 80% of respondents answering 'Yes', 4% saying 'No' and 16% choosing 'I Don't Know'. Not only does this demonstrate a significant sense of gender imbalance in the UK dance sector experienced by many, it also highlights that for some it is not clear. This perception contrasts greatly with the outcomes of our Stage 1 research.

Do you think there is a gender imbalance in leadership in the UK dance sector?

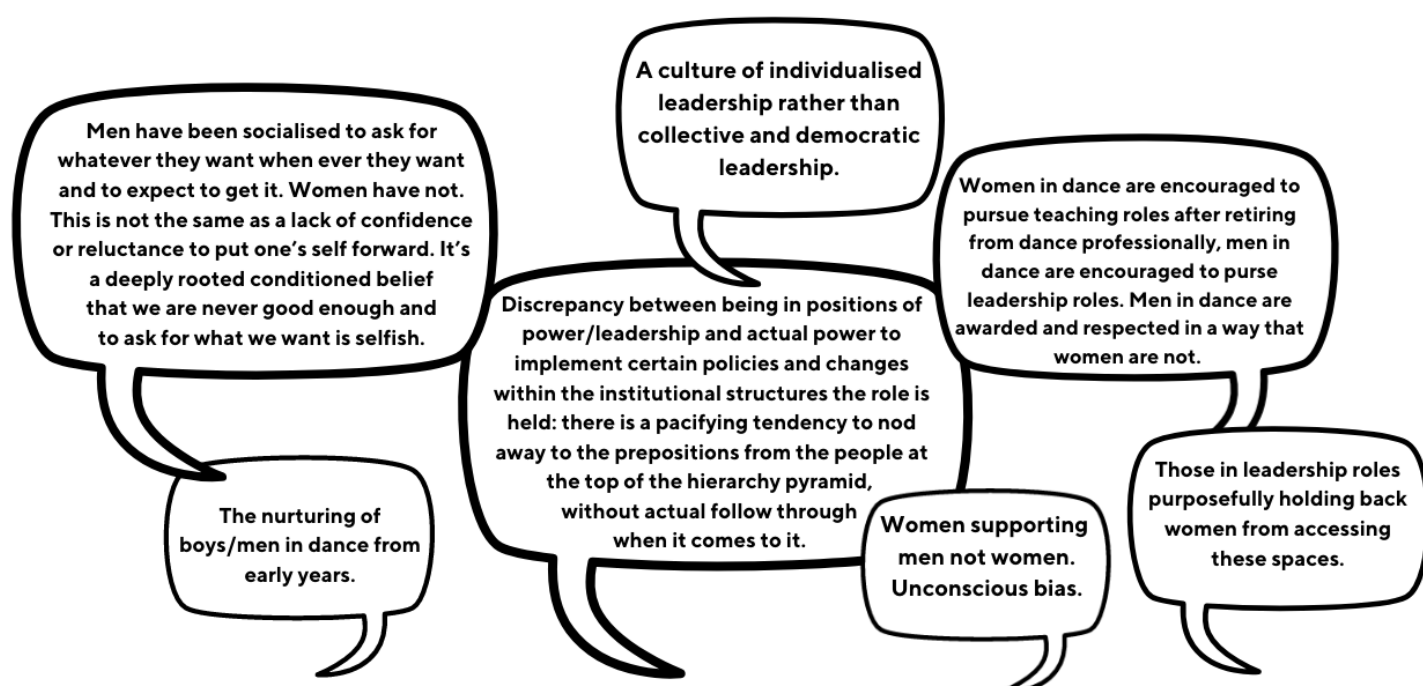
Answered: 176 Skipped: 0



When asked to identify why respondents felt this way about gender imbalance in the sector, a variety of reasons were selected. The top five selected were:

1. Patriarchal set up of UK society (67%)
2. Maternity and motherhood (64.2%)
3. Lack of supportive infrastructure within organisations (eg. affordability and accessibility of childcare) (63.1%)
4. Workplace culture (44.9%)
5. Reluctance to put themselves forward for roles (43.2%)

▼ Patriarchal set up of UK society	67.05%	118
▼ Maternity and motherhood	64.20%	113
▼ Lack of supported infrastructures within organisations (eg. affordability and accessibility of childcare)	63.07%	111
▼ Workplace culture	44.89%	79
▼ Reluctance to put themselves forward for roles	43.18%	76
▼ Lack of confidence	36.36%	64
▼ Lack of opportunities to develop and learn about leadership	35.80%	63
▼ Lack of role models and mentors for women	34.66%	61
▼ Belief that women are not meant to hold power	22.73%	40
▼ Any other reasons not listed here ?	22.16%	39
▼ Lack of transparency in the recruitment process	19.32%	34



Other reasons pointed out by the respondents mentioned the treatment of boys in the sector, women supporting men and not supporting other women, the holding of power and the lack of nurturing of a leadership mindset for women.

We received 79 optional comments from 176 submissions, answering the question:

*“Anything else you would like to share about your personal experience? This can also include examples from your own experience.”*



Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data residing in the optional comments responses in the survey, attaching a corresponding code to each comment. Once compiled, the codes were extracted enabling us to identify a clearer structure of recurring themes. The breadth of responses to this optional question was wide and it became apparent that there was an overlap in many of the responses and that multiple themes seemed to feed into, and out of, a single issue or experience. This emphasises how this topic, and the experience of individuals across the sector, is complex and nuanced. The themes were broken down further into subcategories:

## 1) Unequal Opportunities

It is implied by the responses that being a woman can hinder opportunities and growth within the sector, or the sector is perceived as providing more opportunities to those who are not women. It appears that this collection of voices have struggled with successfully raising funds, a lack of transparency regarding recruitment processes, or not having the visibility, and therefore connections, to grow within the sector due to their gender identity.

*“Men are more respected on the scene, given more opportunities and at a much earlier stage in their career and afforded a lot more 'grace' than women.”*



*"Women often support grassroots developments and start their own projects."*

*"Visibility somehow seems very difficult. I don't want to make work about being a woman, or my identity or my story but this sometimes seems that is all that is wanted from me."*

*"If you struggle with traditional networking due to caring roles, illness or disability then you feel shut out of the sector. There are so many "cliques" and so much pressure to be "seen" working. The sector does not feel welcoming or inclusive, despite saying it is."*

Stage one research demonstrated that women make up the majority percentages of leadership roles in dance organisations. This information, coupled with the experiences shared through the lived experience survey, suggests that there is a distinct lack of visibility of women leaders in the sector. There appears to be tension in how women are expected to present themselves through both their roles and their practice.

Funding levels, as an indicator of financial power in the sector, might also lead to greater visibility. Those who lead 'powerhouse' organisations with significant financial resources seem to be profiled more than those leading organisations in the lower funding bands.

Other examples given of how men have been offered opportunities they have not sought out or have no interest in pursuing, alongside greater numbers of women working in the sector compared with men, seems to have led to imbalance in the opportunities available to women in the sector.

## **2) Workplace Structures**

The survey clearly identified the different types of workplace settings and arrangements across the UK dance sector. It has also been noted that there are clear differences between certain types of organisations in relation to size, the type of work outputs and leadership styles that are embedded into those spaces. Within these structures, women have different experiences of bullying, a lack of woman to woman support and unhealthy leadership styles which are perceived to control or negatively impact their careers.

*"I find that if you're not aggressive or competitive you're not taken as seriously as a woman. Being of a gentle nature doesn't make you a bad leader, in fact it can quite possibly make you a better leader."*

*"Once a major UK artistic director of a dance company which tours worldwide, told me that another female choreographer in the sector was 'too smart for her own good'. This isn't the kind of thing a man would say about another man and is a common perception of confident females trying to get into leadership roles in dance in the UK."*

*"I've found it difficult in a leadership position as a woman but also one that looks quite young. I feel like others in the workplace treat me as if I am inexperienced because they see me as a young girl"*

*"In past managerial positions myself, and other women I have worked with, have been overlooked for the opportunity for promotion from within an establishment due to male dominance in the establishment."*

It should be noted that a number of women shared how their experience of bullying in the workplace resulted from other women. In an industry that has a greater number of women than men, there is often a great sense of women's camaraderie and support. However, it seems that this can also lead to heightened competition between women and a sense of oneup(wo)manship. This research specifically looked at leadership roles in funded organisations but responses to the survey suggest that dance sector history/ies and wider dance structures can often perpetuate toxic leadership behaviours, leading to a trickle-down effect that causes damaging working experiences.

### **3) Systemic issues in the wider society**

An overarching theme in the majority of the responses reflects women's realities of how wider society impacts their experience in the dance sector, specifically suggesting that patriarchy and personal beliefs of others directly affect the work environment and/or practices. We identified societal influences including: sexism and misogyny, self-promotion and intersectionality.

*"In high profile production situations (from 1990's onwards) with predominantly male creative teams, I encountered misogyny, and undermining on frequent occasions"*

*"I have witnessed women in leadership positions perpetuating the same hierarchies and behaviours that cause harm due to the normalisation of patriarchal beliefs and white supremacist values in the industry. I want to explore what qualities of women in leadership we are looking for and how to expand upon those to generate an industry-wide culture shift, rather than putting women in positions of power for the sake of it"*

*"The dance community is a microclimate of society in the UK.... Hierarchy looms...the age-old class system seems to brew underneath all the attempts at a truly [equitable] environment"*

*"Men are highly prized in the dance world. I often think that this gives them the self-confidence and belief to go into leadership roles"*

Recognition of the hierarchy/ies that exist in the dance sector is often not given enough attention, but this was highlighted in the survey responses. The roles women often have in dance and the sub-sectors they dominate can be devalued or viewed as 'inferior', leading to questions of what is viewed as 'success' in dance<sup>9</sup>, which have regularly been raised over the past few decades.

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<sup>9</sup> In 2017 Rachel Farrer and Imogen Aujla published their research findings that explored dance hierarchies and perceptions of success. This was specific to community dance practice, but resonated with the rest of the dance sector. This found that directors and choreographers are often viewed as the 'pinnacle', with school or community teaching viewed as lowest on the ladder of 'success'.  
<https://www.communitydance.org.uk/DB/animated-library/challenging-dance-hierarchies-perceptions-of-success-in-community-dance-pra>

#### 4) Caring responsibilities

A recurring barrier or impact for women appears to be navigating childcare or finding the balance between career and personal life. It seems that this is a strain and defining moment for women who have caring responsibilities, particularly for children, as they continue or return to work.

*"It is my experience that men are preferred for new appointments, particularly as women approach child-bearing age where more flexibility within roles will be required"*

*"Juggling childcare with freelance work is incredibly hard, you just don't have the capacity to drop everything and go"*

*"There is a lack of women performing post children, or choreographing"*

This experience seems to be ever-greatly felt by those who work as freelancers in the dance sector<sup>10</sup> and it is important to continue to consider how organisations and companies work with freelancers in the sector, thinking how leadership and power is experienced through these interactions.

#### Language used by respondents

Language has the ability to shape our thoughts, even perpetuating stereotypes, that may become baseless beliefs about ourselves when not challenged. Analysing how people use language, what words and phrases they unconsciously choose and combine, can help us better understand ourselves and why we behave the way we do. A linguistic analysis of the vocabulary used by the respondents has given us insight into how women perceive themselves within the dance sector, and in relation to men.

Through the above-mentioned question prompt, a plethora of lived experiences were provided by women working in the UK dance sector. The visceral nature of the experiences conjured by the language used must be noted when analysing these responses.

An ongoing rhetoric can be found throughout the responses which is the antithesis of the high value bestowed on men and the lower value attributed to women. Respondents noted that men working in the sector were "highly prized", "treated as special", "believed over all others" and "given a pedestal that women can't reach". Men are described in the responses as "respected", "supported" and that their voices are "amplified simply because of their rarity". In contrast, women described being treated as "a disposable commodity", "less reliable when you

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on current research into freelance dance artists working patterns, please see <https://freelancedance.uk/reports/> from Dr Karen Wood. Lucy McCrudden (Dance Mama) and Parents in Performing Arts (PiPA) are also working to advocate for, change the experience of and develop opportunities for parents in the dance sector.

have children", "on the back foot", "overlooked" and "not taken seriously". They stated that they were "not taken seriously or validated", faced "greater criticism", experienced "undermining", were "rewarded for conforming", forced to have "sacrificed a lot in order to get where I am" and had to "do more to justify my knowledge and experience within this space".

There is a clear disparity in the responses between the sector's perceptions of men and women in senior leadership roles. It is imperative to grant equal merit to both the internal, lived experiences of the dance artist, and to the statistical data on UK organisations which presents an apparent equal gender balance in the sector. In reality, the responses demonstrate a widely shared experience of side-lining and misogyny.

It is crucial to acknowledge the responses offered by the individuals who contributed to the various phases of this research. In particular a common theme has been "banging against a glass ceiling alongside women who were too tired from the emotional and logistical imbalances of motherhood to fight back effectively at work". This individual's candid language is telling of the emotional and psychological burdens attached to their reality while it is begging for a more equitable workforce.

Being candid with our language in a sector that rewards men and is built on gender biases is radical. The language from the survey shows that challenging people directly while also taking care of our livelihood and personally caring for ourselves and practice can be at odds with career progression. The above examples peppered into the writing are raw and first-hand experiences that acknowledge and give space to the women to share their experiences using language that resonates with them. What has emerged is that the individual realities are sadly a collective experience.

*less reliable*

*rewarded for conforming*

*a disposable commodity*

*too tired*

*overlooked*

*stereotyped*

*not taken seriously*

*prejudice*

*greater criticism*

*motherhood*

*undermining*



## Actions to take

*"Data and statistics are indispensable tools for devising evidence-based policies and programmes on gender equality and women's empowerment, assessing their impact and promoting accountability. [...] Currently there are large gaps in gender data which make women and girls invisible"* UN Women

The data collected through this research shows us that on one hand we are on the right pathway in the UK dance sector, but on the other hand there is a discrepancy between what the quantitative data reveals and the lived experiences of professional women in the sector. We acknowledge that simply putting more women in top leadership positions isn't a solution to address the systemic challenges that undermine the sector's efforts to achieve justice and equity. Below we propose a series of actions individuals and organisations can take in order to start producing change:

- **Engage in schemes to specifically address gender inequality and training for gatekeepers and interviewers around gender bias.**
- **Give opportunities to women to practice leadership, or shadow you or your organisation to develop their leadership confidence. Trust their talent and nurture them at all stages of their careers.**
- **Share this research with other women and/or people in your organisation.**
- **Shift our understanding of what leadership can look like and a commitment to practise feminist leadership in the workplace (creating alternatives to traditional, hierarchical leadership and organisational cultures, making undemocratic, untransparent and asymmetrical power relations and dynamics visible). You can learn more about it here, take part or share with your employees through the Clore Social online programme on Feminist Leadership.**
- **Continue to contribute to the discussion by sharing our survey among professional women in the UK dance sector: a 5 minute anonymous survey to gather evidence from women in the UK dance sector. [Click here to access it.](#)**
- **If you are a woman in dance, be aware of your rights and the resources available to you by using the Equity4Women Toolkit, a toolkit which brings together resources for women in the creative industries. [Click here to access it.](#)**
- **Subscribe to our charity newsletter [here](#) to be updated and contribute to future research focus groups.**
- **Download the "Committed to Equity in the UK dance sector" logo [here](#) and add it to your website, email signature or any public document.**

## *Limitations of this research*

The limitations of the research are manifold. We started by acknowledging that this was a short-term research project that was developing processes, methods, research questions, and responded to the data as it emerged. This bespoke mode of working allows for agility and to be informed in real time by the research but does have to focus on one point and not consider others. In particular we see that in 2022 ACE included new NPOs that sat outside of the 2021-22 financial period we focused on. Having the ability to very specifically focus on this time period gives us specific insight which can support those newly awarded NPOs to reflect and implement changes. We are also acutely aware that there might be other NPO organisations who fall within a different category and not under 'Dance' but who might be significant to the dance sector. This type of NPO of course plays a role in influencing the sector but for this first iteration we collected data under one category. It is also worth noting that in the case of Northern Ireland, regularly funded organisations were not equivalent to NPOs as they are mainly funded on a yearly renewal or per project basis.

While the survey opened up a space for individuals to directly contribute, the intersectional lens was not applied to the research project or the analysis. Navigating the voice of the Global Majority in this research project was not the focus, and while some of the testimonies did speak to this, we did not focus on this aspect within this first iteration of the project. This is not to say that there isn't value in analysing and drawing out the multitude of intersectional discrimination that exists, but for this first iteration, we aimed to gain better understanding and a broader sense of gender balance in the sector.

We started by saying that this was a six-month project which developed as the project evolved. With more time and proper funding, the research team would have the space to explore some of the limitations highlighted above. We know and have a sense of how this research should continue and believe there is unexplored territory between gender balance in the dance sector from those in educational environments to those working in organisations and the broader cultural industries sector. We are also keen to better understand two topics: 1) visibility of women in the UK dance sector, especially related to the programming of women choreographers: from how many get opportunities to showcase their work, to the size of stages they get programmed on (small, mid, large-scale); 2) longevity in relation to careers and where individuals have left the sector. The sector is struggling and still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic there was already a sense of women leaving different branches of the sector and after this first iteration of the project we are convinced there is a clear need to better understand this reality. Why are women leaving the sector and under what circumstances? What could be implemented to ensure that women have the space to stay and progress?

There are a number of ways we could continue to explore gender imbalances in the dance sector. Sadly, the problems are varied and understanding is limited. However, we are confident that we have gained the trust of the sector and have the capacity to execute fresh, rigorous, and exciting research that can positively affect the dance sector and positively enhance women's lives.

## Conclusion

In summary, this six-month project which started as a quantitative data collection exercise morphed into a qualitative research project. Mining the 2021-22 NPO dance organisations and better understanding gender imbalances did reveal that there has been some progress in the UK dance sector, with an apparent almost 50/50 split in favour of women, at least, for the more visible positions of Artistic Director, CEO/Executive Director, and Board members.

This, however, doesn't seem to proportionally represent the demographics of the UK dance sector, where women seem to outnumber men (no actual research has been done in this area, but should be in the near future). It is worth noting that the cross referencing data showed us that the more funding a company receives the more likely it is to be directed by a man both in artistic and executive positions.

The perceptions of women in the sector hinted at a disconnect from this data, therefore we moved into excavating the terrain of lived experiences. The survey carried out during phase two pinpointed that women need a space to share their lived experiences and that the correlation between patriarchy, maternity and motherhood, and the lack of supportive infrastructure within organisations to allow women to progress, is a barrier. The language used to describe these experiences reveals the pain, struggle, anger and sadness that women experience when trying to progress in their careers, where they still don't feel valued and heard, sometimes even infantilised. Gender imbalances do not exist in isolation and are directly connected with and interrelated to a number of societal influences.

This research has opened up a discussion which we hope will continue. Change is possible and gender equality is not a women's issue but rather it is humanity's moral duty. We all contribute to and play a role in perpetuating the cycle of inequalities and/or in disrupting it.

# Appendix I

List of the 82 analysed companies in the UK

England:

2 Faced Dance Company Limited, African Cultural Exchange Ltd, Akademi, Akram Khan Dance Company, Avant Garde Dance Company, Balbir Singh Dance Company, Ballet Black, Ballet Lorent Limited, BalletBoyz Ltd, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Black Bird/Red Rose Productions, Blackpool Grand Theatre (Arts & Entertainment) Ltd, Boy Blue, Candoco Dance Company, Cheshire Dance, Company Chameleon, Contemporary Dance Trust - 'The Place', Corali, Dance City, Dance Consortium, Dance Umbrella, Dance United Yorkshire, Dance4, DanceEast, Dancefest, Déda, East London Dance, English National Ballet, Foundation for Community Dance t/a People Dancing, Hofesh Shechter Company, Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company, Leicester Dance Theatre Limited, Ludus Dance, Modern Masterpieces, Motionhouse, Northern Ballet Limited, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, One Dance UK, Pavilion Dance South West Ltd, Phoenix Dance Theatre, Protein Dance Ltd, Rambert, New Adventures, RJC Dance, Rosie Kay Dance Company Limited, Royal Ballet (Royal Opera House), Russell Maliphant Company, Sadler's Wells, Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, Siobhan Davies Dance, Sonia Sabri Company, South East Dance Ltd, Stopgap Dance Company, Studio Wayne McGregor, Swindon Dance, Tavaziva Dance, The DanceXchange Limited, TIN Arts, Tom Dale Company, Vincent Dance Theatre, Wired Aerial Theatre Ltd, Yorkshire Dance Centre Trust, ZoieLogic Dance Theatre, ZooNation: The Kate Prince Company Ltd

Scotland:

21 Common, Barrowland Ballet, Dance North, Citymoves Dance Agency, Curious Seed, Dance Base, Indepen-dance, Work Room, Y Dance

Wales:

National Dance Company of Wales, Ballet Cymru, Dawns i Bawb, Impelo, Jukebox Collective, NEW Dance/Eleni, NoFit State (circus), Rubicon Dance



## Appendix II

Selection of quotes from our Women's Lived Experience survey.

*"I just feel on the back foot, where are the big female choreographers? Who should I look up? Who can I take class from that's a female with power?"*

*"Women face greater criticism than male counterparts. There are also perceptions about women, that aren't parallel to those of men, such as women in leadership are often stereotyped as masculine, cold, stern and many other characteristics when acting as a leader. In men, these qualities are praised and re-labelled as powerful, focused and assertive."*

*"Prejudice is deeply ingrained and male senior colleagues are keen to maintain the status quo. There is a lack of generosity"*

*"The gender disparity in dance works in favour of men. In other male dominated industries, it being male dominated also favours men. For example, in a recent auditions they were looking to hire 2 male dancers and 2 female dancers. There were only 2 male dancers in the audition, and every single woman there had more training, artistry and skill. Who do you think they choose? The only 2 men represented"*

*"Who are the 'knowledge holders' in this space. This is tiring. I feel I need to explain more, get more degrees, do more courses, just do more to justify my knowledge and experience within this space. Visibility somehow seems very difficult."*

*"In my role as producer / co-director, I do find that organisation run by women are generally more welcoming and inclusive. I know this is a massive generalisation but that's what I keep on experiencing."*

*"Certainly in classical ballet, women are rewarded for conforming, are expected not to question and are often made to feel as though there are so many people for so few places that they are expendable (partly true!). This is baked in from schooling"*

*"With regards to female choreographers - the sector has a loooooong way to go. We always prioritise male creatives - you can even see this in the Project Grant funding data. Women are not supported by orgs, funded or programmed - often preferred for youth or community work"*

*"Lack of access support to support disabled leaders"*

*"I think this survey is excellent and important- but I'm also not sure that the answers can paint a full picture without addressing the intersections of 'race', class and disability"*

*"I feel that I haven't been taken as seriously and there has been a lack of respect. Which equally has made me feel inferior, inadequate and also knocked my confidence"*

*"There is a lack of support for women from other women within the sector. For women to progress they feel the need to support/side with male counterparts including management styles and the focus of what is actually important"*

## Team

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Dr Rosa Cisneros (Coventry University Research Collaborator)  
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**Companies:** We want to extend our gratitude to the 70 companies that have verified the data on Artistic and CEO/Executive Director positions:

2 Faced Dance Company Limited, African Cultural Exchange Ltd, Akademi, Akram Khan Dance Company, Ballet Black, Ballet Lorent Limited, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Black Bird/Red Rose Productions, Boy Blue, Candoco Dance Company, Cheshire Dance, Company Chameleon, Corali, Dance City, Dance Consortium, Dance Umbrella, Dance United Yorkshire, Dance4, DanceEast, Dancefest, Déda, English National Ballet, Foundation for Community Dance t/a People Dancing, Hofesh Shechter Company, Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company, Leicester Dance Theatre Limited, Ludus Dance, Modern Masterpieces, Motionhouse, Northern Ballet Limited, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, One Dance UK, Pavilion Dance South West Ltd, Phoenix Dance Theatre, Protein Dance Ltd, New Adventures, RJC Dance, Russell Maliphant Company, Sadler's Wells, Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage, Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company, Siobhan Davies Dance, South East Dance Ltd, Stopgap Dance Company, Studio Wayne McGregor, Swindon Dance, Tavaziva Dance, The DanceXchange Limited, Vincent Dance Theatre, Yorkshire Dance Centre Trust, ZoieLogic Dance Theatre, ZooNation: The Kate Prince Company Ltd, Royal Ballet, 21 Common, Barrowland Ballet, Dance North, Citymoves Dance Agency, Curious Seed, Dance Base, Indepen-dance, Work Room, Y Dance, National Dance Company of Wales, Ballet Cymru, Dawns i Bawb, Impelo, Jukebox Collective, NEW Dance/Eleni, NoFit State (circus), Rubicon Dance

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## Contact us

Our team has worked hard to ensure that this research is accurate and comprehensive in order to provide meaningful insights, but please get in touch if you have identified any mistakes or errors. We welcome feedback and suggestions for future rounds of research. What are the questions which you would like answering from AWA DANCE? Let us know. Get in touch at [info@awadance.org](mailto:info@awadance.org) or on any of our social media channels.

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