

A Question of Pay and Employment in New Zealand Dance - 2009 survey analysis

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Introduction

In 2009 DANZ undertook a survey of pay and employment in the New Zealand dance industry. The survey covered different aspects of work and pay. This report is an analysis of those responses.

It highlights issues and some current trends in dance employment and thinking. The findings show that generally people would benefit from greater knowledge and expertise when dealing with employment and contracts in the industry and there is some need for shifts in thinking.

In response DANZ has now published a suite of resources to directly address some of these issues. Refer to the last page for a list of these.

Background

The New Zealand Dance Industry Strategy was launched at the end of 2008. One of its foci was viability, to “develop a sound and vibrant dance economy”, with specific aims to improve working conditions within the industry and see dance professionals appropriately remunerated. DANZ Executive Director Tania Kopytko explained *“It is not until we begin to explore the nature of our work in a practical way that we will be able to address fundamental issues of sustainability.”*

In 2009 a survey was devised with the aim of providing a picture of the conditions of work, rates of pay and the range of work undertaken across New Zealand dance. To gain the fullest possible picture, questions were asked on a range of topics including: the different roles undertaken, basis of employment, time spent on non-dance work, voluntary work, pay scales and job security.

Information about the project was sent out through a variety of media in July 2009. Survey responses came from across the industry, not in the volume hoped for, but enough to be representative. Income is a sensitive issue and many people felt reluctant to give information on their rates of pay. There were seventy surveys completed covering three hundred and five dance related roles. In addition individuals were interviewed for further information for specific sectors.

Responses covered the diversity of the dance industry from, studio teacher, dancer (contemporary, ballet, commercial, cultural), school dance teacher, tertiary lecturer, administrator, artistic director/producer, choreographer, writer and reviewer. Types of employment included full time, part time, contract and casual. Due to this range of employment situations incomes varied widely, as did the issues relating to terms and conditions of work. This complexity made it difficult to draw comparisons, however by grouping the data and focusing on specific issues we were able to see trends and gauge opinions.

Summary of Findings

- Dance people are well educated, 60% of respondents had a tertiary qualification and 47% had a syllabus qualification
- Respondents rates of pay, in some sectors, had gone down between 2007 and 2009
- A quarter of dancers who responded had been on contracts with pay rates less than the minimum wage. These were contracts for services rather than employment contracts.
- Lack of pay scales in much of the industry (only 40% reported pay scales in their field of dance) resulted in a lack of recognition of training and experience
- Due to lack of funding, dancers' pay was often determined by what a choreographer/producer could afford. Sometimes a choreographer cut their fee to pay dancers and enable the work to proceed
- Dance studio rates vary, with more experienced teachers often reaching a pay ceiling
- In the education sector, schools usually employ dance teachers on a casual rate. Those in full time work commented that pay rates were based on education based teaching experience and their dance experience was not recognised. There were similar comments from the tertiary sector
- Commercial rates are unregulated with a huge variation in pay
- There is a high degree of dissatisfaction with employment, particularly rates of pay (64% were dissatisfied with dance industry income), contract situations, and lack of full time work
- Pay was not a consideration for most dancers entering the profession (86%), but many (44%) suggested they may have to leave the profession in the future because of pay; one third responded that they would remain in the industry as money was not their prime motivator
- Many felt their work was not secure, especially dancers/choreographers; those in education and studio teachers generally felt more secure
- Only 40% of dance professionals who responded earned their income solely from dance, most need to supplement this with non-dance work
- Union membership was very low (14%), of those that do belong to a union the majority were in a teaching union
- On average one third of respondents were eligible for holiday, sick, bereavement and parental leave
- On average about half the respondents thought their contracts were adequate; although only 41% said that their contract adequately covered hours of work, length of day and breaks

- Choreography rates varied enormously, with established choreographers more able to get a fee for their work in contrast to emerging choreographers who often worked for wages
- The largest percentage of funding for works came from CNZ and Local Government but there was also a considerable amount of self funded projects
- Three quarters of respondents had undertaken voluntary work in the two years surveyed, with an average of 105 voluntary hours worked per year
- In addition the sector undertook a large amount of unpaid work

Conclusions

This research raises a number of issues within the industry, which need to be acknowledged and addressed. While rates of pay can be recommended it is widely recognised by the respondents that choreographers, directors, producers and studio owners can only pay according to the income they receive through grants, box office or enrolments. This places limits on the rates of pay in the performance area where some choreographer/directors are not able to pay themselves. Similarly a studio owner can only pay according to the financial situation of the studio business. In general the research tells us that:

- Funding and income for many sectors of dance is inadequate
- Dance professionals pay is low and dancers are not always paid the minimum wage
- There is a lack of pay scales in the industry resulting in a lack of recognition of training and experience
- Contracts are often very basic and poorly understood
- Terms and conditions of work in some sectors of the industry are poor
- Union membership is very low, but where there is a union, pay and conditions of work are much better e.g. RNZB, teachers unions
- Large amounts of voluntary work is undertaken, but also much work is unpaid

The majority of dancers enter the industry young with little concern for income and little knowledge of contract negotiation, collective bargaining or the work environment. They are entering an unregulated largely freelance or part-time environment and so these knowledge gaps are more serious than if they were entering a structured work environment.

The industry needs to work together to raise awareness of good practice, including contract and negotiating skills, and what are acceptable conditions of work. Tertiary education institutions can also play their part in preparing new graduates.

When asked to comment on aspects of their work and pay, many people expressed negative feelings and attitudes towards the industry. Comments included: the lack of status within the industry; low self esteem due to poor pay and conditions; the struggle to make ends meet. Alongside these comments there was a huge passion for dance and a strong commitment to the profession.

In general dance professionals are educated to a high level, yet the attitude of 'doing it for the love of it' remains highly prevalent. Greater professionalism is needed throughout the industry,

which will come about through skill development and attitude change. Accompanying this there needs to be a broad cross industry commitment to raise the profile of dance in New Zealand in order to attract greater funding, enable stronger business opportunities and for dance to gain recognition for the contributions it makes to our culture, wellbeing and economy. For change to come about a raft of things need to happen including the following recommendations

Recommendations

- That DANZ produces guides to information and advice on pay rates (refer to: *Research Findings – Rates of Pay for Dance*)
- DANZ produces a dance project evaluation guide for best practice in producing dance performances and events (refer to: *360 Degree Project Evaluation*)
- The essential elements of a contract are developed as a resource (refer to: *Contract Checklist for Dancers*)
- The relevant unions promote their services more broadly to dance people and run regular recruitment/training sessions (for union information refer to www.actorsequity.org.nz, www.together.org.nz)
- Dance people develop skills in negotiating and collecting bargaining for contracts
- Agents are encouraged to advocate for people on their books to ensure they receive at least union rates, where applicable, over and above their percentage cut
- That the minimum wage paid for dance professionals as employees or contractors is always in line with the government minimum wage. This would include the rates of pay recommended by Creative New Zealand in their funding guides; funding applications and budgets should reflect this
- Dance people respect the industry and profession and work ethically (refer to: *DANZ Codes of Professional Practice and Dance Best Practice & Business Ethics*)
- Dance people take on board that they need to find new ways of working, increase their business acumen and invest in their broader skills development outside of dance (refer to: *Being Professional & Surviving in the Dance Industry*)
- Dance people are actively involved in advocacy to develop the sector (refer to: *The DANCE TOOLKIT – a call to action!*)

For these and other DANZ resources see DANZ website resources page, www.danz.org.nz/resources.php

Thank you Creative New Zealand for supporting the development of professional resources.