

Dance Research Matters

10:00am – 12:00pm, Thursday 10 February 2022

Meeting Notes

Chair: Sarah Whatley, Coventry University

Support: Helen Weedon, AHRC; Sophie Cummings AHRC

Attendees: Angela Pickard, Ann David, Christopher Bannerman, Clare Parfitt, Efrosini Protopapa,

Kate Marsh, Lily Hayward-Smith, Sara Houston, Victoria Hunter, Vida Midgelow, Tia-Monique Uzor, Funmi Adewole

Apologies: Lesley Main, Kate Elswit

1. Welcome and introductions (HW and SW)

Helen Weedon (HW) welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Dance Research Matters Advisory Group, which is a gathering of people who can help improve how AHRC supports dance research. The session will not be recorded, but notes will be taken and shared.

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves to the group.

Sarah Whatley (SW) thanked everyone for making time for this event. It is good that so many people could join the meeting at such a critical time for dance research and take the opportunity to talk about dance and what matters to the sector. In late 2019 HW visited Coventry to talk to the team there, and this led to last summer's #DanceResearchMatters symposium and dance emerging as a research priority for AHRC. The Dance Research Matters symposium took place last summer, and it felt like a significant event with excellent panels and presentations considering practice research, intervention into other fields, pathways of research and many other topics. There was a rich array of presenters and wonderful conversations. Christopher Smith, the Executive Chair of AHRC, took part in the event, in conversation with Deborah Bull. Christopher has described this as a highpoint of his year. The symposium and ongoing conversations have led to us meeting today and thinking forward to what impact we can have around dance research. In the background, the team at Coventry have been keeping the momentum going.

2. Reflections on the Dance Research Matters Symposium

- Publication and website

Kate Marsh (KM) echoed SW and HW's comments, saying how lovely to see everyone at the meeting. Following the Dance Research Matters symposium, there has been lots of work behind the scenes at Coventry to keep the conversations and momentum going. One of the key legacies will be a publication, and discussions are ongoing about its format and target audience. The publication will reflect the event and include different perspectives and opinions.

Lily Hayward-Smith (LHS) discussed the Dance Research Matters website. This was initially created to promote the symposium but now acts as a useful record and source of information: https://danceresearchmatters.coventry.ac.uk/?page_id=509

The website hosts a report on the event written by Kathryn Stamp and Vip Artpradid, which Advisory Group members are encouraged to read.

The team at Coventry are also focusing on podcasts. Opening remarks by symposium presenters have been captured and turned into short podcasts. Many panel member presentation papers are also included. The conversation between Deborah Bull and Christopher Smith should hopefully be added soon.

Members of the group and symposium presenters are being encouraged to write blog posts which complete the statement "Dance research matters because...". Those interested in blogging should contact LHS (lily.hayward-smith@coventry.ac.uk).

Information about this Advisory Group will be added to the website.

Coventry University's media marketing team recorded interviews and general event footage on day, so these can be used on the website or for future marketing.

- Overview of delegate responses and emerging themes

Sophie Cummings (SC) from AHRC spoke about the use of Menti during the symposium to gather attendee feedback and shared some of the responses. 78 delegates shared feedback through Menti during the symposium which provides useful insight into the research community thoughts and concerns.

To the question "Why are you here today?", the most common responses were Networking, Community and Connections/connecting.

To the question "What do you want to get out of the event?", the most common responses were:

- Inspiration
- Connection and networking
- State of play – context, conversations about the status, opportunities and challenges for dance research today
- What the future for dance research looks like
- Funding and collaboration opportunities
- Advocacy for dance research

Delegates were asked to select the highest dance qualification they held. Private dance school qualifications, Master's degrees and PhDs were the most common responses.

"Describe one thing you wish you had known at the start of your dance research journey". The most common response to this question was the challenge of accessing funding. Other responses included:

- The importance of networks, support networks and advice
- Challenge of getting practice research recognised or valued

- The challenge of the research process (time, recognition in academia, difference from making works)
- The challenge of holding or moving through multiple professional roles and Positions

“Three things you want the AHRC to know”. By far, the most common answer to this question was the need for funding, from almost half of all responders. This included the provisions of dedicated calls, clearer guidance and studentships. Other responses included:

- Assessment processes better suited to evaluating dance research, including training for peer reviewers or more reviewers from dance backgrounds

Commented [LH1]: Should we add a note here about adding the minutes to this page and asking everyone approval or just if they object to this?

- A more visible/tangible commitment from AHRC towards dance and the arts side of its remit
- Greater support for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research
- Valuing practice based research

3. Meeting format, purpose and membership (HW)

HW explained that AHRC are keen to get the framework to support Dance Research Matters set up in an appropriate way but without too much bureaucracy. She then shared her screen to take the Advisory Group through the draft Terms of Reference.

Dance Research Matters is about developing an AHRC research investment and engagement programme, with a focus on practice based research. The Terms of Reference sets out the context, background, aims and baseline for this project.

Dance should be appearing in the next AHRC business plan. One question for Advisory Group members to consider as we continue – what’s an accessible definition of “Embodied Research”? The Terms of Reference recognise the challenge facing the talent pipeline, and status of arts and dance within Higher Education Providers. EDI is included and we have an aspiration to form a group to help us conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. This will be discussed during AOB, but do challenge AHRC at every stage so AHRC can do better.

The advisory group is empowered to advise the AHRC Creative Industries Team to make sure the Dance Research Matters programme delivers on its commitments.

Questions and comments from Advisory Group members followed:

Vida Midgelow (VM): How did we end up with this set of people on the Advisory Board – who is in the room and who is not?

HW: We approached people who are already actively taking part in dance research, but we will update the Terms of Reference with a more thorough description of membership and methodology.

SW: VM raises an important point. We have begun by talking to people who had already expressed an interesting being involved, or who are conducting dance research. This may not be the final composition of the Advisory Group, but this group can help advise on ultimate

formation, diversity and representation. There is no expectation to be part of this group if you do not feel best placed.

Clare Parfitt (CP): I want to follow up on the idea of approaching people who are working “where research takes place”. Speaking on behalf of those working where they would like research to take place, but where teaching is currently the main focus, we should reflect the experience of the many people who would like to be more involved in research. Barriers to research may be more present in institutions that aren’t represented here. We should broaden the conversation to include people who aren’t able to participate in dance research in the way that they would like.

SW: CP’s point is very important, and we should consider universities with lone scholars. We want

to be inclusive as possible, especially considering the pressures facing dance in universities.

Ann David (AD): In institutions not reflected in the Group, there are people struggling to get academic positions but who are doing important research. They may not be on the Advisory Board, but they can contribute to these discussions.

Christopher Bannerman (CB): We should represent the conservatoire systems. This project can make research more visible through dance journey and should be aspirational.

Vicky Hunter (VH): We should also include colleagues from the north of the UK, Wales, NI, etc.

KM: The comments about who is in the room are interesting – this group shouldn’t just talk to itself, but be open and create dialogue and bring voices, ideas and networks into the conversation. The group should always be willing to challenge.

CP: I wanted to ask about the rationale for the focus on practice based research. Practice based research is important, but there are lots of other areas of dance research which have been under pressure (including decolonising dance, community dance, etc) which are important too.

HW: Practice based research is an emerging priority for AHRC, and Dance Research Matters is breaking ground for AHRC in this area, but all areas of dance research can and should be reflected. We are using discussions around practice research within AHRC to raise profile of dance. There is growing interest around moving the grant process away from academic papers and traditional textual outputs to other, more creative ways of showing success, discovery and impact.

CP: Some work needs to be done around the language used around types of research, broadening knowledge and epistemologies.

SW: CP raising important points, and we should pick this discussion of language up later.

Christopher Smith, in his discussions around practice research, recognises that the labour of creative research has not been acknowledged, and that the efforts of artists in research should be rewarded.

CB in the chat: Perhaps invite presentations from representatives of specific groups for each meeting or to address a particular theme?

VM: We can also help the AHRC understand how knowing meet a public in and beyond ‘conventional’ modalities.

Efrosini Protopapa (EP): I am curious about dance being used to shift thinking in AHRC around practice based and embodied research. How has that happened?

HW: These discussions and the Dance Research Matters project have come about at the right

time, and we have undertaken advocacy. The Invisible Difference case study has also helped.

SW: This initiative has been driven by HW, and Christopher Smith has recognised the impact of AHRC's actively engaging with the sector.

HW: Dance is also a good research area to explore these themes. It has a small community and is historically underfunded. It gives us the opportunity to rethink the model for how we do fund creative arts. Our role at AHRC is opening the door for dance research and you, the experts, to take the opportunity and decide what you need. We need your expertise, including around what language we use.

Sarah Houston: I am going to have to leave. Interesting conversation, thank you Helen. Just to say, I'm interested to see dance coming into more Knowledge Exchange and public engagement activities.

4. 5 min break

5. Current challenges and opportunities for dance research AND What can AHRC do in this area? (in breakout groups)

Group 1: SW, EP, KM, TMU, VH, SC

VH: Embodiment is a really important concept. Dance is well placed to support discussions about the post-COVID return to the workplace through applied research around movement and embodied knowledge.

EP: The return to live performance is an area of interest, in terms of ways of working, and ways of relating. Dance is getting recognised in wider fields and we have confidence in what we know. There is a challenge around language and text, and text-based knowledge can be exclusive/can exclude.

KM: Jonathan Burrows and Scott Delahunta have undertaken interesting research around the meaning of embodiment. We all understand this concept as something different, even in the dance sector. We should think about making language more accessible to other sectors and spend time thinking about these research terms so we can deploy them properly. Closed language can be an obstacle to how we are perceived.

Tia-Monique Uzor (TMU): I have learned through applying for funding is the challenge of the legibility of dance research to bodies that don't principally deal with dance, even when applications are supported by my institution. There could be an opportunity for an Early Career Network – not just bringing people together, but sharing expertise gained from research officer support, funding application experience, and other tangible things to help ECRs move their careers and research onwards.

KM: I know of applications which seem to match needs of funders but feel like the funders don't understand our research area. How do we articulate a case for support in a way that connects with funders? We need to address the discrepancy between what we are saying and how it is being heard.

TMU: There is a question of who is reading these applications and what are we up against? AHRC as a funder is important, it can be more challenging when approaching organisations that don't traditionally fund dance.

EP: We could train ourselves to present the way we make our case, but this programme could help funders look at assessment methods. Some of us may have experience of funding schemes

moving away from text heavy application and assessment approaches. Funding calls can be redesigned.

Adapting dance applications to match broader impacts can be a challenge. challenge to translate the impacts of dance. But we can move too far away from the intrinsic qualities and values of dance, and those key research questions around the artform of dance itself can get lost.

SW: That's an important point. We have an opportunity here to not only decide what the funding is for, but how applications are designed and assessed. We need to think about processes that are more sensitive, adaptive and appropriate for the artform. Things can change and we don't have to follow prescribed ways of working. The focus on Early Career Researchers is important. There has been a shift in HE institutions towards impact, Knowledge Exchange, etc. It can feel dance is in service to those things or used to facilitate other forms of research. We need to assert our own particular knowledge, skills and values, and be able to speak about dance on its own terms.

VH: There is an opportunity for AHRC to shape dance research and be an international thought leader in decolonising structures and methods, and democratising space. It's an opportunity to shape UK dance research and position the AHRC and the dance community as leaders in decolonising knowledge production, hierarchies, structures, methods and systems of doing research - democratising spaces, institutions, ways of relating and communicating ideas across communities and contexts.

SW: One of the strengths of dance to AHRC is we are a well-functioning, small community. There is the opportunity for significant impact.

EP: Universities have a lot of emphasis on teaching, and academics have less time for research, or have multiple roles and responsibilities. Practice research can require intensive blocks of time but universities may struggle to accommodate this. The material conditions of practice research may not align with current university conditions. How can funding enable researchers to undertake research and universities to give people the time and space to undertake it? Is there another way other than buying out the time of researchers?

SW: There is a science model that seems to work, where PhDs support lab-based research, and there is a structure that flows into funding and how departments work. Is that something we need to bring into play?

The challenge of practice research is resource – you need people, time, space. The benefit of a focus on practice based research is it shines a light on this complex ecology of resources.

VH: On projects, our partners tend to be small organisations and teams. General AHRC grants expect partners to have and to be able to commit resources, which ours don't. Also, the opportunity to work with these partners might be more time critical. Smaller pots of funding linked to more agile calls with a quick decision time would be beneficial, similar to the COVID response grants. This could seed initial scoping and partnership work.

SW: We do good work with 3rd sector orgs, and that needs to feed back into our institutions and their understanding of what we do, and how we work. If this programme is about asserting what matters to us, it can feed back into our home institutions. If there was a metric for this type of working, it would demonstrate enormous impact.

VH: Postdoctoral placements are important – many ECRs struggle to find funded opportunities.

EP: We should remember people working outside universities, who are conducting research but can be hard to include on current and recent applications. Can there be dialogue with or

networking opportunities for university researchers with artists with their own knowledge, practice and research?

SW: This one of the reasons why Christopher Smith is so interested. How do we involve artists within this ecosystem?

KM: Networking space for ECRs – what is the power when ECRs collectivise? Can supported early career researchers share experience with lone researchers?

TMU: A lot of the time it's hard for ECRs to know what is happening in the wider research and funding world. There is benefit to spending time alongside peers who are going through the same thing.

KM: Shared experience would benefit people

Room 2: HW, LHS, VM, FA, CB, CP, Angela, AD

Challenges:

- No time for research within unis
- Cutbacks
- No time to bid
- Too much teaching commitments to enable time for research
- Uneven playing field
- Impacts of covid – no study leave
- Loss of talent – challenge of how to sustain a career
- Size of sector – makes it fragile and susceptible to small changes leading to big impacts – this is also opportunity...
- What about 'pure' dance – it's an even smaller world
- Focus on knowledge exchange and bids that bring money impacts dance leaving no room for analysis for example in decolonisation
- Recognised shift to applied artistic product
- Govt view soft creative subjects...
- Constant need to prove our own existence
- Constant focus on undergrads
- No money in the wider dance sector either!
- Application process... written only and complexities of language

Opportunities:

- Close and trusted collaboration between artistic and academic dance sectors
- Fusion...skill/artistic experience
- Building the research at the start
- Responsiveness – to societal change
- Strongly united sector across dance as a whole
- Unis role as cultural influencers and institutions
- Create a coalition for culture
- Collaborate
- Being forced to think differently and operate outside of institutions/unis are we capturing the views of the self-employed and independent sector?
- Can we separate research and teaching?
- Create an independent dance research organisation?

- Not relying on money
- Artists as scholars/scholars as artists?
- We need a British based focus on creativity, resilience and decolonisation to ensure social change comes about
- Focus on inclusion

AHRC Take Aways

- Raise understanding of practice based within the Academy
- Is there too much focus on business? Are the creative industries embracing arts?
- Research is just part of the dance eco system
- Language
- Organise networking events
- Retreats for researchers and artists
- Support for doctoral research to enable greater reach
- Support for bidding
- Seed funding
- Smaller grants with less process to facilitate low hanging fruit and act as steppingstone to other opportunities
- Step change – create a dance based IRO
- Share examples of success
- Create a toolkit
 - o how to approach funding
 - o support circles
 - o making the time
- Secondment opportunity

6. AOB and next steps

Communication and access preferences

Equality Impact Assessment working group

Date of next meeting

HW: We would like to do an EDI group early on. If members would like to be involved, please email us.

AD: It would be a useful output for this project to create a toolkit around approaching grant funding. This group has expertise and experience – a creative toolkit could be shared.

VM: Support, creating spaces or support networks around navigating funding applications and academic processes. What data is available – how many dance applications come in to UKRI, and what is the success rate?

AD: Is there any data on failed bids which can be shared?

EP: Is there any feedback on unsuccessful practice research applications to AHRC?

SW: Data really important, including, collaborative doctoral awards, how many dance PhDs funded, the number of peer reviewers from a dance background.

VM: Also how many dance departments are even in the DTPs

VH: Yes, and the impact on applications etc when your institution is not!

VH (in chat) Embodied Knowledge is research that places bodily experience and bodily knowledge at the centre of the research enquiry, areas might include somatic, corporeality, knowing through doing, movement, dance and choreographic practices, sensation and affect. The next meeting is planned for mid/late March and a doodle poll will be sent out.

Next steps:

- Review Terms of Reference to consider feedback
- Reflect on membership of this group – who isn't here? Independent dance researchers, conservatoires
- HW to do blog for DRM website
- Members interested in joining a subgroup to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment to email Helen Weedon
- HW, SW, LHS and KM to get together.