



Inc Arts UK

**For an inclusive
workforce**

Review and recommendations on the Wildfire Rising Associate Artist Programme

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This document is an invitation to start a discussion.
Not an end in itself.

We welcome the conversation with you.

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1. Antiracism and continuous improvement

1.1. Reflective Reading

This report is an invitation to start a discussion, not an end in itself. We invite the reader to practice reflective reading to make the most of it and stay open to creating new views or progressing old views. Learning and change take time. After reading this report, we invite you to reflect on what you have learned, how useful it may be, and how you may cascade this learning in the Wildfire Rising programme's continuous improvement process.

1.2. Reflective Prompts and Inquiry

The reader may want to keep a few questions in mind when reflecting on the inclusivity of this programme:

About individual's needs

- Could the programme adapt the type of support it offers according to people's experiences and needs?
- Can the programme ensure that participants are comfortable in online meetings?
- Can the programme increase flexibility in what is expected from the participants?
- Can the programme always supply clear information and ensure that participants understand the information shared?

About the positive impact of a diverse setting

- What could be the benefit of supporting more communication between participants?
- What could be the value of enabling participants to explore more of each other's work?

About the structure and the components of the programme

- Could introducing a series of planning sessions at the start can improve both the programme and the outcomes for participants?
- Can the programme improve the balance of in-person/zoom engagement in case of another lockdown?
- Could the programme supply more on the job training activities?
- Could the budget be more flexible or supply more funds for professional development?

About the networking and skills showcasing opportunities

- Could the programme facilitate more contact with the dance and instructor community across the country?
- Would it be workable to invite participants interested in hosting their own masterclass?

2. Observations on methodology

The goal of our approach was:

- to identify success and progress to be made in providing safe and welcoming space; for artists as part of this programme;
- to identify action-oriented suggestions from participants' experiences and feelings;
- to build a written report that the organisations use for their funding research and organisational learning and development.

2.1. Feasibility

There is a high expectation of receiving more unapologetic feedback that is not being impacted by the fear of hurting the programme leaders. However, the programme was not

finished at the time of this conversation. Therefore, there is still a risk that any pre-existing worry or barrier to providing negative feedback gets in the way of complete transparency.

The risk is losing participants' trust in the programme if feelings shared during this exercise break any confidentiality agreement.

Limits and mitigations: To ensure a satisfying level of confidentiality, we anonymised the information received and provided only action-oriented feedback informed by the feeling perceived during the exercise but free from narrative accounts. We recommend organising a feedback activity a minimum of 6 months after the end of the programme to receive more transparent feedback.

2.2. Unbiased space

The process aims to provide an unbiased space for participants to share their feedback and feelings about their programme experience. There is an assumption that some barriers prevent participants from sharing negative feelings.

The risk here is to ignore positive feedback that can also inform learning if the focus is solely on negative feedback.

Another risk is to overestimate the level of transparency from the feedback.

Limits and Mitigation: We will use evidence-based methodologies to provide unbiased space to receive participants' feedback. However, as bias is inherent to any human interaction, we will acknowledge its existence and commit to taking it into account in our report.

The report provides relevant action-oriented suggestions that the programme leads and their organisations can implement and discuss at the level of this programme and its dependencies.

2.3. Accessibility

The report is provided in written and audio format to participants. However, this long format can be monotonous to read or to listen to and we would welcome any suggestions in relation to accessibility.

3. Wildfire Rising Programme: A Programme that values the resilience of Dance Professionals minoritised in the sector

3.1. Background of the report

The knowledge exposed in this report is based on the Wildfire Rising programme:

- mid programme review notes
- initial selection criteria
- interview information
- interview questions
- information and video of the Spread your Wings conversation

We also refer to the conversation we facilitated between participants:

On the 23rd and 26th of November 2021, we held meetings - online and in person - for the Black, Asian and ethnically diverse dance professionals participating in The Wildfire Rising Programme led by Movema and Cheshire Dance.

We were asked to facilitate a conversation with the three artist-participants in the programme to discuss their experience from start to end (recruitment, interview, the content of the programme, etc.), including:

- what they have benefitted from, what was missing;
- how the structure of the programme felt for them (e.g., enough amount of contact time?);
- how useful they found the support provided during the programme;
- what kind of complexity, if any, the difference in participants' backgrounds is adding;
- any barriers to participation and engagement at each step of the programme;
- what the participants' feelings are about the timescale of the programme?

The meetings were part of the Wildfire Rising Programme evaluation activities. Facilitators sent invitations which made it clear that Inc Arts would be hosting the meetings. Also that

all contributions would be confidential and anonymised in order to minimise any concerns around possible recrimination, and impact on professional careers.

To meet participants' availabilities, we organised a 2-hour in-person session with 2 participants and a 1-hour zoom session with the third participant.

This report does not provide narrative account of participants' experience and feeling to respect anonymity of their contributions. It rather details what we learned about the programme and what actions should be taken to improve participants experience.

3.2. The facilitated conversation

A total of 3 people participated in the sessions. The consultant ensured that each participant understood the purposes and approach of the conversation. Because of the low number of participants, anonymity was a challenge that we were very careful about at every step. The sessions were not recorded, but notes were taken, and we committed to submitting any written report to participants first, so as to gain their formal agreement before sharing the content of the report with facilitators of the Wildfire Programme.

Approach to the conversation

Our trauma-informed approach allows us to recognise specific needs people may have due to past or ongoing trauma. This trauma can come from many places and manifest as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism - and their intersections - and have lasting effects on people's lives. In the UK arts sector, as in all professional sectors, microaggressions operate through and live in the policies, practices, and spaces that ethnically diverse people navigate daily. A multiply marginalised person will experience the world around them significantly differently from people from the "more dominant" groups.

Open-ended questions allows us to establish a platform for better understanding participants' experiences, their thought processes and thus give us more insight and context.

This approach allows us, as much as possible, to:

- provide a supportive, safe and nurturing environment for everyone;
- ensure participants could choose to contribute and feel in control of the outcome of their contributions;
- make decisions with participants and not for them;
- demonstrate consistency and reliability;
- acknowledge participants strengths, skills and resilience;

- recognise inequality, oppression and exclusion so we could respond sensitively and humbly to participants' diverse needs.

3.3. What we learned about the Programme

Cheshire Dance and Movema launched 'Wildfire Rising', an associate artist programme with the aim of removing barriers of inequality by investing in and supporting dance artists from African, South, East and Southeast Asian diasporas to make way for the rising of their artistry, representation and development.

Background of the programme

This programme is rooted in the belief that dance has the power to provide shared moments of joy and humanity beyond racial or social barriers. Movema and Cheshire Dance both want to provide a platform for culturally diverse artists to share their journey and their current challenges within the industry, including:

- how they're progressing
- how matters have been addressed or unaddressed
- to enable the voices of artists, their ideas and their visions to be heard and shared with key change-makers within the sector

For the past 12 years, Movema has worked tirelessly educating people about cultural differences whilst also celebrating similarities and differences in their artistry and services.

In October 2020, in response to the #BlackLivesMatter movement and to celebrate Black History Month, the 'Spread Your Wings' programme of events highlighted and celebrated the artistic excellence of the African Diaspora.

As part of this programme, Movema also created and developed communications channels for ongoing support, networking and opportunities for Black dance artists. A panel of dance artists, educators, scholars and programmers led on an important conversation, an opportunity for Black dance artists in the North West to share and discuss barriers and challenges within the dance sector.

This programme was delivered in collaboration with Black People in Dance (UK) and supported by COOL - Collective & Culture Liverpool - as a part of a larger collective of specially curated art commissions across the city.

Movema pursued the conversation with Cheshire Dance and solidified a partnership to support culturally diverse artists. This Wildfire Rising Associate Artists programme is one of the outcomes of that partnership.

This programme is the expression of their commitment to nurturing open conversations within Dance professionals around equality dynamics and inclusion issues to progress and develop a mapping of diverse networks and use the power of their position in the sector:

- to bring the issues of the freelancers that sometimes get lost amongst strategic objectives
- to consult the community, teams and clients through annual events

The recruitment of the participants took place in May 2021, and the successful participants started the 6-month programme from July 2021.

Participants

The programme recruited three North West based dance artists, who each took part in paid, bespoke professional development and reflection and received a £1.5k commission with support to develop their dance work.

The organisation of the programme's curriculum and its different phases also aimed to help participants overcome specific barriers. They had the opportunity to discuss and share their experience as part of a panel of Dance and Arts professionals.

Overall, the programme invited participants to reflect on professional development, freelancing, associate artist roles and further CPD.

The participants come from different backgrounds, cultures, educational settings, and they have different kinds of family responsibilities. Their career path to dance was not straightforward, and they all had to overcome unique challenges.

Along the way, they developed specific skills, knowledge and abilities that form strong narratives of their resilience.

Participants are at different stages of their projects which vary from leading dance classes, pursuing doctoral studies or creating a Dance performance.

Content

The programme was a direct response to urgent support needs from Dance communities during the challenging times of COVID 19 and the increased visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement. Facilitators provided activities via Zoom or in person.

Programme requirements:	<p>as part of this programme, participants were expected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to develop professional practice and artistic work • to apply for Arts Council England match funding • to contribute to sector knowledge of minoritised artists' needs in the sector.
Guided professional and artistic development	<p>participants received</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the support of two programme facilitators • the support of a chosen mentor • the support of a chosen coach. • ten days of paid time (£250/day) for professional development.
Dance: practice and knowledge	<p>participants were provided with dance specific learning activities around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dance teaching methods • world dance styles including Indian, African, Brazilian and Chinese dance styles • the impact of diverse dance styles on communities • delivering diverse dance styles to diverse groups (age, ability, background)
Employability and self-development	<p>to support participants' journey to getting a job, returning to work, or taking the next step towards fulfilling their career goals, the programme also provided learning activities around</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time management • personal goal setting • finance including budgets and costing • bid writing • project management • organising and delivering dance classes • personal branding and professional marketing • self-guided professional development activities to support development as and when needed.
Networking	<p>participants are part of the Movema and Cheshire dance communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they can work with partner organisations Milap, Irie Dance, Capoeira For All and Global Grooves • participants are also invited to stay connected with each other and with the facilitators. • They receive quarterly updates on opportunities, classes and other relevant information.
Public speaking	<p>the Spread your Wings conversation contributed to participants' development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their understanding and ability to talk about current issues that affect diverse communities • how dance can be used as a tool to develop tolerance and address racism and prejudice
Further support	<p>after the programme end, the organisations continue supporting participants in their next steps and offer opportunities to stay connected, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free use of a zoom account for the six months following the end of the programme

- free use of studio space for the six months following the end of the programme
- opportunities to market their work within newsletters, the organisations' website & through social media.

The Spread your Wings conversation

The Spread your Wings conversation offered an open and structured environment for the dance artists from the global majority to share and discuss barriers and challenges within the dance sector.

Two dance specialists from the global majority, facilitated the conversation: Ithalia Forel (Co-founder and Director, Movema) and Akosua Boakye BEM (Dance Practitioner, Lion King Children's Casting Director, Co-founder Thea Barnes Legacy Fund.)

The ambition was to provide a safe, open and structured environment for global majority dance artists in the North West to share and discuss barriers and challenges within the dance sector.

Guest speakers also included Amanda Parker, Founder and Chief Executive of Inc Arts and Paul Smith, Programme director of Dance Consortium North West.

Information discussed focused on informing the sector of future support, training and opportunities, necessary to support global majority dance artists' career potential. The conversation was a hybrid event that took place in person and on YouTube Live delivered in collaboration with Cheshire Dance and funded by Arts Council England and Liverpool city Council.

Participants were able to discuss and explore with the panel and the public challenges they encountered as part of their professional journey. They discussed:

- creating career opportunities in the UK for artists with a Chinese dance background;
- taking into account artists stage of development, artistry and needs;
- lack of support and training for diverse dance arts in low income areas;
- training and development routes to develop for artists working in culturally diverse dance styles.

Evaluation activities

The programme contained evaluation activities to gain knowledge of minoritised artists' needs in the sector, including:

- their motivation to enrol onto the Wildfire Rising programme

- the marketing of the Wildfire Rising programme
- their experience in applying for the Wildfire Rising programme
- all communications regarding the Wildfire Rising programme

Mid programme review

The mid programme review was the opportunity to understand what participants got from the programme, what additional needs they may have, what challenge they may be encountering, and how the facilitators could help and support them. Participants were also invited to think about their next steps as part of the programme.

3.4. Recommendations to enhance participants experience

Sustaining the value and strengths of the programme

Movema and Cheshire Dance are aware of the lack of provision for minoritised dance professionals' needs in the Arts and Dance sector. The programme offers opportunities for feedback on how organisations could meet diverse professionals needs.

Application phase

At this stage, the inclusive application process is key in ensuring a positive first contact with the programme. It also ensure that everyone inside and outside the organisation's network can access the programme.

The call for applications recognising challenges and inequalities related to protected characteristics, past experiences and past achievements.

The leading organisations create a clear pathway for participants to enter the Dance sector. The programme provides support to progress professional and creative projects. Participants from different backgrounds and networks, join the organisations' programmes and benefit from Movema's and Cheshire Dance's support.

During the programme

Facilitators are committed to ensure people feel part of the programme by creating an atmosphere that nurtures a sense of psychological safety and favours positive learning and creative process engagements. This is essential to support participants making the most of their experiences and enabling them to make positive contributions to the programme.

Communication

The programme fosters transparency and accountability in all communications between facilitators and participants by ensuring:

- All participants can discuss their individual goals in a clear and engaging manner
- Catch ups, coaching and mentoring allow participants to express their wishes and to receive support, advice and resources that answer their particular needs
- Multiple opportunities for participants to give feedback, including a mid-programme evaluation

Leaving the programme

Before leaving, participants are asked to plan their next steps and for the programme to positively impact their next professional projects.

Reinforcing the intersectional approach and the flexibility of the programme

As a next step, the programme could reinforce its intersectional approach and flexibility. The following recommendations aim to guide the programme in acknowledging those unique experiences of overcoming barriers. We recommend the implementation of a clear framework that values participants resilience by acknowledging their strengths and past achievements.

Themes the programme can further explore to value participants' unique experience and resilience (who they are, what they have achieved, what their ambitions are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, as well as their personality, motivations and dislikes):

- Participants' specific goals, and how the programme can enhance the chance of success for their project
- Participant's vision of the world and the specific way they want to lead on their project

- The personal risks taken to realise their projects
- How participants would have done without the programme
- The kind of support they are after: creative or practical or other
- The resistance that may happen and that they are already aware of (Self Awareness)
- The resources they can draw upon
- Their level of independence as well as their learning and communication style
- A previous experience of failure or mistake and what they have learned from it
- How will they flag if the programme is not working for them?
- Reasons that may cause them to leave the programme
- Their plan to develop independently outside of the programme
- The value the project adds to their lived experience
- Their longer term projects.

Recommendations:

We recommend offering more opportunities to exchange knowledge and skills and to collaborate in showcasing skills, creative practice, and creative inspiration inside and outside the programme. Besides, understanding who the individuals are and how their intersections meet can avoid minimising and minoritising participants' experience on the programme by:

- Valuing collaborative projects between participants
- Creating more projects and networking opportunities where participants can showcase their work and make professional connections.
- Discussing socio-economic background, learning and communication styles and preferences with participants from the start

Participants' projects are born from different paths and reflect different professional and personal needs and wishes. This diversity of experience requires a diversity of accessibility and support provision. The programme can expand its principle of flexibility by:

- Allowing more flexibility in participants' use of their budget so it reflects their particular needs
- Giving more opportunity for planning activity at the beginning of the programme

- Letting go of the assumption that all participants will need a coach/mentor to achieve their particular development goals.
- Taking more time to acknowledge diversity of need by creating a more structured initial needs-assessment phase and being flexible enough to respond to the particular needs of each individual.

Adjusting the activities at each phase of the programme

Based on participants experience, we suggest an adjustment of the resources allocated to each part of the programme.

At the beginning of the programme,

Facilitators should bear in mind that, even if there is knowledge about the protected characteristics in society and groups that are minoritised and marginalised, it is important to be open to individual experiences and unique needs. Participants may want to discuss their and other participants' unique hopes and fears and be part of the draft and review of a group agreement along the way. We would recommend that you:

- Complete an initial training and development needs assessment and support the participant in setting personal goals
- Facilitate group conversations where participants can share their projects and hear a feedback from their peers. This should include:
 - Self-introduction,
 - What do they want to achieve?
 - What does that look like?
 - How will they feel when they achieve this outcome?
- Start the programme with planning sessions
- Clarify personal boundaries, hopes and fears and let the group create their own group agreement
- Provide an online participant folder with clear instructions on how and when to use the documents.

During the programme we recommend providing:

- Flexible budgeting
- Continuous feedback loop (short anonymous feedback after each session)
- Facilitated conversation and observation of the group's activities by an external facilitator
- Collaborative dance project between participants
- Opportunities to give back and share their knowledge with the community, creating value (social or financial value)

At the end of the programme, we recommend

- Facilitators to conduct exit interviews on what the programme can do more or should do less.
- Participant to commit to complete a follow up interview 6 months after the end of the programme with an external partner.

Finally, in recognition of the emotional labour required from the facilitators, resources should be allocated to support their own reflective practice through external supervision, coaching or mentoring.

Conclusions

The Wildfire Rising programme facilitated by Cheshire Dance and Movema provides an inclusive experience to dance professionals who want to develop their professional projects in the UK dance sector.

This programme is also a valuable experience for the sector to better understand how they can support the development of artists and professionals that are minoritised and marginalised in the UK society.

Compared to other programmes, the Wildfire Rising programme is very inclusive and raises the bar of what can be achieved.

This report recognises the high value of this programme for the sector and the North West Dance community. More resources could contribute to a positive step toward excellence in inclusive practices to nurture the global momentum on inclusion.

We recommend providing additional resources for:

- The implementation of further feedback activity six months after the end of the programme to further learn from participants experience.
- Inclusive professionals to receive support or supervision during the programme to acknowledge the compassion fatigue resulting from antiracist work.
- Inclusive professionals to undertake regular antiracism training. Additional learning activities are suggested in the next page and can be valued as part of inclusive practitioners Personal Professional Development.

RESOURCES

Below are some resources that we highly recommend the facilitators of the programme engage with to increase their understanding of the key elements of inclusive practice.

Resilience, psychological safety and toxic positivity

We recommend developing knowledge and a framework around acknowledging resilience.

- Introduction on resilience: <https://positivepsychology.com/resilience-in-positive-psychology/>

- Understanding the impact of flexibility to provide psychological safety: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/returning-to-work-keys-to-a-psychologically-safer-workplace>
 - <https://peoplenottech.com/articles/good-behaviours-and-components-of-psychological-safety-explained/>
 - <https://thepsychologygroup.com/toxic-positivity/>
 - <https://theconversation.com/how-to-avoid-toxic-positivity-and-take-the-less-direct-route-to-happiness-170260>
 - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliawuench/2021/11/01/toxic-positivity-in-the-workplace/?sh=d696a791e6f8>

Communication and Intercultural communication

There is an increased use of online video activities due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is vital to consider the new challenges facilitators and participants can encounter and the many different ways they are experienced.

We also recommend developing intercultural communication awareness among facilitators and participants. The programme may also integrate a conversation on intercultural communication when hosting an intercultural programme.

We recommend below an introductory video on the cultural humility framework. You may also want to integrate a conversation on “needs outside the box” where participants can share their needs independently. We recommend introducing open questions when discussing needs.

- Understanding the experience of taking part in online activities.
 - <https://theconversation.com/5-reasons-to-let-students-keep-their-cameras-off-during-zoom-classes-144111>
 - <https://www.edutopia.org/article/camera-oncamera-dilemma>
- Introduction to intercultural communication: <https://youtu.be/QjEDxlzZnIo>
- The cultural humility framework: <https://youtu.be/SaSHLbS1V4w>

Inc Arts Work For An Inclusive Arts Sector

The work we do with you and other Arts organisations across the UK is informing our antiracist advocacy work. We anonymise the data and knowledge collected to:

- inform antiracism conferences for the sector
- share best practices and progress
- provide case studies from client experience and progress
- show individual needs from diverse workforce experiences
- promote mental health support
- promote antiracist networks and events
- develop EDI routines for employers and regular EDI training
- contribute and organise Conferences
- collect feedbacks
- secure legal expertise
- offer advice on antiracism strategies and issues in the sector
- expand into music, heritage, archives, and collections and develop an Arts sector 'Think Tank.'
- contribute to our Skills Exchange Programme