

## PREGNANCY AND PARENTHOOD - THE DANCER'S PERSPECTIVE

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VINCENT DANCE THEATRE / DANCE UK /  
CREATIVE AND CULTURAL SKILLS

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A research project  
exploring issues around  
pregnancy, parenthood  
and the return to work  
for professional dancers  
and dance companies in  
the UK

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Photography: Matt Simpson

## REPORT

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# vincent dance theatre

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by Charlotte Vincent  
Artistic Director  
Vincent Dance Theatre

## FOREWORD



Photography: Matt Simpson

As a maturing female choreographer, leading an established, internationally known company, I have witnessed a shifting landscape of needs and desires both within myself and within the female collaborators I work with as we enter our mid 30's and early 40's. The sense of 'family' and 'belonging' that being part of a colourful ensemble offers is no longer enough. Settling down and honouring biological urges should not necessarily signal the end of a performing or choreographic career. How to continue to be 'occupational travellers' with children in tow?

Vincent Dance Theatre creates work that reflects the emotional world we live in. Our company policies advocate equality. Our work aims to nurture individual strengths and give voice to autonomous thinking. As a female Artistic Director I actively and unashamedly celebrate mature female arts practice. To keep talented female practitioners working in the UK dance sector we must create the appropriate conditions for their return to work after having children.

In 2005 my closest collaborator left the company to have her first baby. The negotiations around her departure raised challenging questions for the company and for me as the Director. How could we respond to the changing needs of dancers who become pregnant and want to keep performing? How could we best accommodate maternity and parenthood and in so doing keep brilliant collaborators within the company mix? I steered a precarious route through this emotive, virgin territory, and without clear guidelines or advice felt ill equipped to make decisions about how best to support, advise and nurture a pregnant dancer. She left the company in 2006 to be a full-time mother, and has since returned to work as a freelance choreographer / workshop leader and had a second child. In the same year, a second long-term collaborator took 18 months off work to have her first baby. She returned to work in late 2007, and made and toured a solo piece as part of a double bill with her family accompanying her on tour. She has since had a second child, and the whole family are again touring with the company in autumn 2009 and spring 2010.

My two close collaborators' pregnancies and the company's attempts to accommodate their evolving needs raised many difficult questions for me and triggered the need for some kind of wider contextualising study to do with dancers and pregnancy. What models exist that Vincent Dance Theatre could learn from to better manage pregnancy within the company? What conditions does the company have to provide to maintain collaborative relationships with women after they have children? What are the health and safety implications of dancing or devising when pregnant or in the months afterwards? How much should being a parent influence devising schedules and

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touring patterns? How best to arrange childcare on tour? How could my company develop a family friendly policy as a model template of good practice within the small and middle scale dance sector? This research document is a starting point.

Conducted by Vincent Dance Theatre's General Manager Jane Whitehead in collaboration with Dance UK and Cultural Skills Council, I hope this research offers a reflective and positive resource for dance practitioners who make the leap into parenthood. I hope that the recommendations we suggest support Artistic Directors and dance leaders to make better choices in managing pregnant dancers than I was able to make first time around. I hope this research encourages best practice in companies of all shapes and sizes, and raises expectations of working conditions for parents who opt to remain actively engaged in the UK dance sector.

Charlotte Vincent  
Artistic Director  
Vincent Dance Theatre

by Helen Laws  
Healthier Dancer  
Programme Manager  
Dance UK

## FOREWORD



When Vincent Dance Theatre approached Dance UK about this piece of research in 2007 we had just completed Dance UK's Pregnancy and the Dancer Information sheet. During the process of focusing on the subject we'd become aware of a number of issues that needed more investigation. Concurrently, Dance UK's Deputy Director was also in her early stages of pregnancy and as a small organisation, we were also ensuring that our policies and procedures were up to date, and that our general management of the process was accommodating and supportive, as well as being legally compliant and financially manageable. Hence, Dance UK was extremely pleased to be able to work with one of our key members to take this work a step further.

The dance workforce, both performers and administrators, is dominated by women. The physical nature of a dancer's job combined with the mobile nature of a touring company and job opportunities, makes pregnancy and the adaptations to lifestyle needed to accommodate motherhood a key issue for performers.

In 2007, Dance UK held a symposium in partnership with Dance Umbrella, which focused on the mature professional dance artist. One of the reasons highlighted at this event for the low number of mature dance artists was parenthood and the difficulties in combining a career as a dancer with having a family. This year, Dance UK and Dance Umbrella have co-organised a debate focusing on the perceived lack of high profile female choreographers working in the UK. Again, the role of the demands of motherhood has already been suggested as a key barrier to women maximising on the highest profile opportunities in choreography.

Both of the above indicate that the dance sector isn't particularly successful at maintaining and encouraging female artists to reach the highest levels of their profession. It was fascinating therefore, to read the results of this research, *Pregnancy and Parenthood: The Dancer's Perspective*, to understand further to what extent this is down to dancers not feeling able to return to work after having children and for what reasons.

This research also reveals what dancers' experiences are of pregnancy and the realities of returning to work; what the challenges are for both employer and employee; and how knowledgeable companies and choreographers are in managing maternity issues.

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There are key issues that arise from this research, some of which reinforce concerns that have been raised by individual dancers and companies before. For example, it is clear from this report, and evidenced in Arts Council England's Dance Mapping report, (published September 2009) that low levels of pay are a significant barrier to pursuing a career as a dancer whilst raising children. And from the employee's point of view, the extent to which dance companies can support their dancers through maternity and return to work is hindered by a lack of financial resources. These are obviously crucial areas that still need to be addressed.

Dance UK supports best practice in all areas of work within dance and its Healthier Dancer Programme works to ensure that dancers can achieve sustainable, long-lasting careers in dance. Having a baby is one of the most life enhancing, enjoyable, if at times challenging experiences. Dance UK strongly believes that dancers should be able to combine this with their chosen career as a dancer.

I hope this report will be a step forward in making this a more viable option. This report will help through the dissemination of its findings and by providing useful resources and practical advice for choreographers and dance companies to adopt straight away. Meanwhile, Dance UK will continue to raise the profile of the bigger issues, such as dancers pay, to try to enable dance artists to combine having a family with a successful performing or choreographing career, and more generally nurture healthy work-life balance for dancers with and without children.

Helen Laws  
Healthier Dancer Programme Manager  
Dance UK

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## INTRODUCTION

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This research project, initiated by Vincent Dance Theatre and planned and delivered in partnership with Dance UK and Creative & Cultural Skills, aims to explore the issues and challenges around pregnancy and parenthood which face professional dancers, practitioners, choreographers and companies working in the UK. Multiple challenges including safe working during pregnancy, returning to dancing after maternity leave and maintaining a demanding career as a parent, often with long hours and frequently working away from home, mean that few dancers expect to be able to have a family and a dance career at the same time, and companies are often wary of taking on the challenge of working with parents with young children. Dancers tend to delay parenthood, meaning that companies rarely or never work with parents, and dance artists who do have children and companies who work with them can feel isolated and uncertain about whether they are getting it right.

The issue also links to the ongoing debate within the sector about mature artists and why so many dancers, especially women, seem to disappear when they reach their mid-thirties. Companies who wish to work with mature dance artists need to know how to make working conditions attractive to them, to fit in with the changes they may have made to their life (including families) since their early career of continuous rehearsing, performing and touring, often working on a short-term project by project basis.

Charlotte Vincent, Artistic Director of Vincent Dance Theatre, initiated this project as a direct result of a need to find a solution for the company. Wanting to work with peer practitioners in their 30's, 40's and 50's including those who have or wish to have children, VDT had struggled to find advice about what constitutes good practice in terms of working safely in the studio, supporting parents returning to work, and appropriate support for parents working away from home and on tour.

Talking informally to peers and colleagues working independently and within other companies, Vincent Dance Theatre realised there was a real lack of dance-specific advice and information. In 2007 Dance UK had produced 'Pregnancy and the Dancer', an information sheet providing detailed information about dancing during and post-pregnancy, supplementing the general information given to expectant mothers, and Creative & Cultural Skills, the sector skills council for the creative industries, had also asked Charlotte Vincent to write about her experience for creative-choices.co.uk, the new online resource providing advice, knowledge and networking support about working in the sector. A new piece of work looking at returning to work and supporting parents seemed a natural next step, and so the three organisations joined forces.

The aim was to hear from dance artists, choreographers and managers working across the spectrum of dance in the UK, and we were delighted to receive responses from a broad range of individual practitioners, independent choreographers and companies including Candoco Dance Company, Random Dance, Henri Oguike Dance Company, Retina Dance Company, Jonzi D Productions, Carol Brown Dances, Breaking Cycles, India Dance Wales, Falling Cat, Qdos Dance Theatre, Dora Frankel Dance, ballet companies Northern Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet, the Royal Ballet and Australian Ballet and also from dance agencies Dance Digital and Greenwich Dance Agency.

This research and resulting report is intended as a way of sharing experience and ideas, challenging the notion that dance is only for younger practitioners with no family commitments and getting people across the dance sector talking about the issue of pregnancy and parenthood in order to move the debate forward.

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## METHOD

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In order to get a picture of how the issue was affecting those working in the dance sector, the project sought to hear from dancers and dance practitioners about their experience of combining a career with parenthood, and from choreographers and companies about how they worked with pregnant artists and supported parents. Two separate questionnaires were devised – one for choreographers and dance managers as 'employers', in the broadest sense, and the other for dancers and dance practitioners themselves, including teachers, workshop leaders and former dance artists who had left the industry.

Dancers and dance practitioners were asked about working during pregnancy, returning to work and continuing their career, focusing on the support, if any, that they had received, what additional support would have made a difference to them and about the career decisions they had made and why. To give context to responses, dancers and dance practitioners were also asked about the kind of work they did – whether they were in full-time work, employed on short-term contracts, or self-employed.

Choreographers, artistic directors and managers were asked about their experience of working with pregnant dancers and parents, what support they already provided, if there was additional support they would have liked to offer and what prevented this. For context, choreographers and managers were asked about the number of dance artists employed or engaged each year, whether their organisation was funded, and for their financial turnover.

Questionnaires were distributed in June and July 2008 via mailings and email, targeting membership organisations and networks, individuals and companies. More than 1000 individuals were contacted through Dance UK and Equity's membership, National Dance Agencies, local dance network organisations. More than 300 UK companies and choreographers received the questionnaires, via Dance UK and Equity's membership and projects funded by Arts Council England, Scottish Arts Council, Arts Council of Wales, Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The research was also publicised in the dance press, and online with pieces on Juice and dance blogs and networking sites. With the aim of offering convenient ways of taking part, responses were invited by post, email and over the telephone.

Responses began coming in immediately, and continued throughout summer 2008. Reminders were sent out throughout the autumn, aiming to encourage as many responses as possible, and the response deadline was the end of December 2008.

The responses received came from a broad range of dance organisations, including ballet and commercial companies, small and middle-scale touring companies, individual dancers, dance practitioners and choreographers.

From the information received, the research team sought to identify some trends in experiences, draw out suggestions and examples of good practice for companies and choreographers to adopt, and explore where issues across the sector could be addressed.

## RESULTS

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A total of 57 completed questionnaires were received between August and the end of December 2008, representing a wide range of experience and practice – from individual practitioners and small independent companies to middle-scale touring companies and large-scale ballet companies. Appendix 2 provides a breakdown of responses in table format (page 35). The remit of the report was to look at this issue in dance in the UK, but questionnaires were also circulated to some international contacts to see how experience and provision compared, and a further 6 responses were received from Australia and the USA. The non-UK responses are not included in the figures quoted in this report.

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### RESULTS: Dancers and Dance Practitioners

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The 29 dance artists who responded were all either already parents with children ranging from newborns to teenagers, or expecting their first child. Only one father responded, perhaps revealing that the impact of parenthood on careers is still considered to be primarily the concern of mothers, or perhaps the questionnaire simply found its way to more mothers because of the title 'Pregnancy and Parenthood in Dance'. 9 of the 29 respondents worked full-time as dancers or dance teachers, while the rest were either working freelance or employed on short-term contracts to deliver specific projects. Freelance and short-term contract work ranged from one-off sessions to 12 month contracts, working on independent projects and with small, middle and large scale touring companies.

All but one of the respondents had returned to work after maternity leave, and 19 of them said they had returned to the same kind of work. Of this group of 19, only 3 had returned to permanent employment as a performer, while 12 had returned to freelance or short-term work as a performer and the others said that they returned to their previous work as a teacher, lecturer or workshop leader.

Most of those working freelance or on short-term contracts also noted that they worked differently since having their children, choosing projects to fit with childcare and working hours.

In terms of advice and support, all but one of the 9 respondents in permanent employment had been given information about maternity/paternity pay or other benefits, and most were satisfied with the level of information they were given. Responses ranged from:

*'The company gave very good information on maternity pay and worked out the best option for me in terms of when to return to work.'*

*'I was given a sheet, told to read it and to ask if I had any questions. Not particularly helpful but it did tell me all I needed to know.'*

Asked what other advice or support would have been useful before having their baby, the most frequent response was that more contact with other dancers who had children would have been helpful:

*'The most useful thing is talking to other dancers and seeing how they have coped with having children.'*

*'I would have found reading material about the experiences of other professional dancers and their babies a useful resource.'*

Dancers who responded said that combining their career with dance represented an enormous challenge, describing feelings of insecurity resulting from physical changes caused by pregnancy and birth, and concern as to how their career would affect their child.

*'I find it extremely difficult. Mostly from the point of view of maintaining my fitness and technique levels and reducing the risk of injury. As I choose to work part-time, it's been hard physically on my body.'*

*'I find this never gets any easier as I always feel guilt at not seeing my son for whatever intense period of time, but then I know that it will come to an end and then I have a big block of time with him. In an ideal world, it would be wonderful if I could take the children with me if I had to tour outside of my locality.'*

The need to maintain and return to fitness in order to perform physically demanding roles was also cited as one of the main reasons for planning a job change alongside parenthood, moving into a different role with dance as a teacher or manager, other reasons were to secure better pay and more regular working hours.

Asked about the support they had received from the choreographers, companies or other organisations they had worked for, 5 said that no support was available and others detailed support that ranged from being understanding and flexible where possible, agreeing and sticking to working hours and schedules, providing physiotherapy, pilates and rehabilitation, to taking children to work or on tour:

*'(My) current employer allows me a lot of flexibility. If children are ill I am allowed time out. If I have to go home early I can, within reason.'*

*'Some (choreographers/companies) understand that finishing on schedule is important and doesn't mean 'not willing to work'.'*

*'A certain amount of flexible working is brilliant, however a solid regular timetable is often more helpful as it makes it far easier to organise childcare for regular slots.'*

*'There isn't any help available. If my colleagues have childcare issues as well then we try and resolve the situation by pooling our resources together.'*

Several respondents said that working for people who were parents themselves was easier because they already understood the issues:

*'The only (employers) who ask me about or consider childcare issues are those with children themselves.'*

*'My colleagues and the other small companies I work with generally understand this as they are themselves parents. They at times pool child care, bring their children to rehearsals, or allow the children to play.'*

*'If you are working with someone who has children then they are usually understanding.'*

Dance artists working as teachers and workshop leaders, some of whom had changed jobs after having children, said that they found this kind of work more family-friendly:

*'As a teacher, I find it easy to work - the kids can always sit in the studio and replacement teachers are easier to arrange than replacement dancers. I am more supported by fellow teachers than I was by fellow dancers, choreographers etc.'*

*'I now work with young children, which means I can take my son to work if I need to.'*

*'Currently I choose to do more education work as the pay is better, the hours are shorter and I can manage most of the childcare myself with a less help from family. I began to stop enjoying the touring as I felt too guilty being away from my children and the hours were too long.'*

Dance artists who make their own work and are able to determine their own working patterns noted that this was beneficial to them in combining their work and career:

*'I run the company, therefore I am able to fit work around my schedule. This is only possible though because we are a small project-based company.'*

*'I tend not to work full hours - I work intensively, but shorter days as well as spread rehearsing over a longer period. This way of working suits my creative process in general.'*

*'My daughter has been integrated in to my performance life. She has attended many training and rehearsal sessions and sometimes performs with me.'*

Apart from the support of partners and other family, childcare – and its availability, flexibility and affordability - was mentioned most often when dancers were asked how they were able to manage the logistics of rehearsing and performing:

*'Flexible child care is essential – (I have been) lucky to have support from family and my childminder.'*

*'Childcare in the UK is extremely expensive. The grandparents play a major role in touring and performing periods.'*

*'I have to choose what (work) I am doing so it fits in with my childcare, I have a good childminder who is flexible and some really good babysitters.'*

*'When I am working on a project I have been able to organise the hours to fit in with the childcare.'*

Childcare issues clearly apply to all working parents, not just those in dance, but low levels of pay within the dance sector makes affording childcare problematic for dance artists. Arts Council research published in 2009 reveals that 23% of dance professionals responding to their survey earn less than £5,000 per year, and 61% earn less than £20,000 (Arts Council England Dance Mapping Research 2008/9). Meanwhile, the current typical yearly cost of a full-time place in nursery or with a childminder for a child under two is in excess of £8,000 in England, with after school clubs costing a typical £40 per week for children of school age (The Daycare Trust Childcare Costs Survey 2009).

*'Sometimes I have to turn work down because I wouldn't be able to get there at the starting time or the money isn't worth it after you've paid for childcare.'*

*'(There should be) better pay for artists. Raising a family on Equity minimum is challenging.'*

Touring was acknowledged by dancers with children as being the biggest challenge in continuing to work. Time spent away from home, long and unsocial hours made this especially difficult:

*'I was only able to consider touring if it allowed me to come home every night.'*

*'I did in fact take my daughter on tour with me for one year, but all childcare arrangements were made by myself, relying on friends/husband/other dancers to look after my daughter during rehearsals and performances.'*

Asked what additional support would have helped them, assistance with childcare was parents' most popular answer, although respondents recognised the cost implications of childcare provision and the financial constraints that companies and choreographers have to work to. Interestingly, other than childcare, the kinds of support dance practitioners said would be beneficial to them did not have major costs attached - these included:

- attitude of choreographers and companies

*'I know when you are creating work it can consume your life, but (choreographers) need to remember that their dancers have lives outside the job with or without children. Also long hours make dancers more prone to injury anyway and dancing parents can miss out on important rest and recovery during heavy rehearsal periods.'*

*'There is still the thought that once a female dancer has children she won't give as much of herself as before when (it) is often the opposite.'*

*'This is especially difficult if you feel isolated within the company due to your desire to start a family and if you are the first person in the history of the company to deal with issues connected with pregnancy and motherhood.'*

- schedules fixed well in advance to allow childcare to be arranged

*'It would help if choreographers made an effort where possible to schedule time effectively so that working hours are concise and structured.'*

*'Having a yearly or even quarterly plan of rehearsals/class/performances would help in planning for childcare.'*

- the opportunity to do class and keep in touch while on maternity leave or not working

*'Support to regain fitness levels etc. could have helped my return to work. An example of this could be that I could take part in company class weekly.'*

*'Email contact, invitations to performances, general contact, I was left feeling upset that I had simply become surplus to requirements.'*

- the opportunity to be in touch with others who had been through the same experience in order to get practical advice and also help with feelings of isolation

*'A network of experienced dancing mums would have been useful to exchange information as the work and the lifestyle differ greatly from most other regular jobs.'*

- better access to information about practical issues such as maternity pay/tax credits.

Details of benefits and support available to parents are included at Appendix 4: Guidance and Information (page 46).

Overall there was a strong feeling from dancers that flexibility on both sides and a commitment to make things work were the most important factors in building successful relationships with choreographers and companies:

*'(We need) more mothers working in companies. Therefore shared support and advice. The idea that bringing your family with you (on tour) is normal.'*

*'If there is an attitude that it is alright for the company to operate at the expense of the family, sometimes the parent needs to be allowed to say that the artistic ask is too much and the rest of the company need to be forgiving – all will try to make it possible – the show goes on!'*

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## RESULTS: Choreographers, Directors and Companies

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28 UK responses were received from independent choreographers and directors, and from directors and managers of funded, project-based and independent companies with turnovers ranging from £19,000 to £13million. 24 described themselves as running their own company, 10 as independent choreographers or directors and 2 as freelance choreographers, with some having more than one role. Of the companies represented by respondents, 19 received regular funding from the appropriate Arts Council or from the Department for Culture Media and Sport, and 11 were project funded, through Grants for the Arts or other schemes. 10 respondents described their work as small scale, working with between 3 and 18 dance artists per year, 11 defined their work as middle scale, working with between 6 and 40 dance artists per year, and 5 as large scale, engaging between 10 and 60 dance artists per year.

11 of the respondents had worked both with pregnant dancers and those who already had children, while 5 had worked with parents but not with pregnant performers. 1 had worked with pregnant performers but had not worked with dancers who had children. 8 had not worked with either and 3 did not answer this question.

The questionnaire asked whether choreographers and companies exceeded their statutory duty of care regarding pregnant workers and parents, in terms of putting additional support in place. Just 5 respondents had a written maternity/paternity policy in place, while 7 operated an informal policy. The companies with written policies were among the larger, better-funded organisations who responded, and therefore likely to have the most sizeable permanent staff teams. Their maternity / paternity policies applied to all staff and did not necessarily include guidance and information specific to dancers, although additional support was available, including occupational health advice and plans for work during their pregnancy. Risk assessments, which must be carried out for all pregnant employees, were tailored for dance artists.

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Comments included:

*'We apply the same policy to dancers as all other staff. Although they stop performing as their pregnancy progresses they continue to do class for as long as they can and are required to carry out other tasks as required.'*

*'We have a Maternity Policy and Health and Safety Policy that applies to all employees and conduct risk assessments as necessary.'*

*'(Artists are) entitled to the appropriate statutory provisions for paid or unpaid antenatal, maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave and for dependant care and crisis events.'*

Respondents who operated informal policies tended to tailor support to the needs of the individual, noting that they worked with pregnant practitioners so rarely that an informal approach worked best for them:

*'We offer statutory maternity and paternity provision. Each person is dealt with individually – have always tried to be flexible and work with each individual, but we need them to tell us what they want.'*

*'Performers have been assigned other lighter duties in other departments once they have become too pregnant to perform until they take their maternity leave, e.g. in wardrobe etc.'*

*'During pregnancy the dancers go onto 'safe duties' up until roughly a month before their due date and then return to work with the support of the medical team and rehabilitation ballet mistress and pilates/body conditioning instructor. This is outlined in the parental leave policy.'*

*'As all are self-employed, everything is discussed for each individual. For some jobs (generally teaching) they are given the option to continue depending on their personal health and others where we feel there is a risk (generally touring involving late nights, missing meal times etc) we explain our concerns and encourage them not to take the risk.'*

While tailoring support to individuals' need is very valuable, it is also good practice to have a written maternity/paternity policy in place. A policy sets out how statutory requirements will be met, giving a useful checklist to refer to, and, by deciding in advance what additional support to offer, companies or choreographers will be prepared when the situation arises. This can help remove uncertainty when working with pregnant employees or new parents, giving a clear process to follow in a sensitive situation. Adopting good working practices for dancers, including regular breaks, rest periods and number of hours worked also helps reduce problems and injuries for all dancers, not just pregnant performers or new parents. For sample policies, see Appendix 4: Guidance and Information (page 50).

Only one company said they would definitely stop dancers performing or training once they had disclosed that they were pregnant, having received advice from health and safety, occupational therapy and medical experts that the risk to expectant mother and child through strenuous activity was too great. Instead, their pregnant dancers continue to take part in class at their own pace, to have non-physical involvement in rehearsal and to be involved in other duties:

*'We feel strongly that it is the employer's responsibility to protect employees so must stop pregnant performers rehearsing and dancing as soon as they disclose that they are pregnant.'*

7 of the choreographers, companies and managers who responded said they had worked with dance artists who had returned to the same kind of work after having their child, and 2 with dancers who had returned to a different kind of work. 6 said that no dancers they had worked with had taken maternity leave or stopped working to have a baby. Interestingly, while most companies and choreographers had worked with either pregnant dancers or parents, none at all had worked with more than two who had returned to the same job after having a baby – so even those with a policy in place for working with pregnant performers or parents had very infrequent opportunities to put it into practice and limited experience within the company of having been through it before.

Some choreographers and companies linked the fact that they had never or rarely had a dancer become pregnant or employed a parent to the fact that performers often change their career direction at the point at which they decide to have a family, moving into education work or administration, enabling them to be away from home less, on tour and for work.

*'The company has tended to employ young dancers in general averaging from early to late twenties. We have never had a dancer approaching us saying she was planning a child or indeed confirming a pregnancy.'*

*'The nature of the work is that it is extremely physical and physically demanding. Dancers generally start working with the company in their early twenties, and though often stay for long periods of time (8-10 years), there is a definitive point where it becomes time for them to move on in order to continue working in a less pressured environment.'*

*'Most of the young men and women who I connect with are still not considering having a family or are still feeling like they need to do their dancing days first. I understand this feeling but feel that if there was support around the birth and early years time they would feel less scared of losing their momentum and place in the dance community.'*

*'None of our dancers have become pregnant, only freelance education facilitators where there is more personal choice of hours/type of work undertaken and this dictates how they choose to operate during pregnancy.'*

On returning to work after having their baby, support available to dancers included a phased return to work, flexibility around working hours where possible and specialist physio or occupational health advice (within larger companies):

*'A risk assessment is undertaken on return, generally dancers want to get back to performing and tend to be up and running again pretty quickly. There is a lot of back up from physio and occupational health which is crucial.'*

*'A formal risk assessment is undertaken as part of our statutory duties. We aim for a flexible approach and try to give a personal touch, as every case is individual – every mother has a different experience, and the nature of the job requires flexibility.'*

*'I consider what they are capable of but am aware that the situation may change at any time. This means it's difficult with projects and limited finance. My experience when pregnant was that it is better not to make any assumptions!'*

*'During maternity leave they are welcome to attend class. On return from maternity leave they do class and are cast as and when they are able to perform the role.'*

In terms of ongoing support for working parents, 3 of the 11 choreographers and companies who had worked with pregnant dancers or parents said that they did not offer any form of support, while the others offered a mix of flexible working hours, the option to adapt the job description, help with childcare and parental leave e.g. if their child is ill. Respondents who had not worked with dancers who had children gave details of support available to other staff, with 18 of the total 28 respondents offering support of some kind:

*'Childcare vouchers are available, it's up to the individual to apply. There is a flexible working policy across the organisation. (It is) important to try not to treat people (parents) differently. There is a career-break policy, people can take 3 - 12 months off, which can be attached to maternity leave, though no dancers have taken this to date - dancers tend to want to continue performing for as long as possible.'*

*'We work with freelancers (but) would be keen to employ dancers on a PAYE basis in the future. Previous experiences include accommodating having child/ren in rehearsals, childcare supplied on site (but paid for by parent), flexible working hours and accommodating needs when the child is ill.'*

*'Children of my dancers are often allowed to watch rehearsals/classes/workshops etc. They are included as best as possible without disrupting the work process.'*

*'The company will do all it can to support dancers with children, allowing parents to bring children into the studio sometimes and allowing them to come on tour. We are also part of a childcare scheme.'*

*'Childcare support is offered through a voucher scheme. Flexible working hours are not easily possible on tour, but one male dancer was allowed to work a 4 day week after the birth of his son. A couple also took their baby on tour with a nanny.'*

The majority of those who responded said that they would have liked to be able to offer more support and, like the dancers who responded, acknowledged help with childcare as being likely to have the biggest impact. Cost was the biggest issue that prevented them from doing more:

*'We would like to be able to offer a better maternity leave package, but this is a financial issue. Also workplace childcare or a nursery would be ideal. We do need to balance provision for those who have children against those who don't - so the non-parents are not subsidising parents.'*

*'Tight budget is the only limiting factor of what we can offer dancers and education facilitators in terms of childcare.'*

*'Would like to offer childcare but no space or money to pay for it.'*

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*'I would like to be able to offer childcare support so that I can reintegrate my dancers into projects. I have worked with them for years and it suddenly stops because they have kids.'*

Asked if working with pregnant dancers or parents of small children had impacted on their creative process, respondents cited positive as well as challenging impacts:

*'It is positive to have parents on the team and people returning to work, it makes for a happier workforce and improves our understanding of our audience – both young people and of parents. It also helps us maintain a work-life balance, and can be a reality check about long hours and priorities.'*

*'(There is a) fractionally slower creative process with pregnant women due to obvious physical restrictions. There can be problems with consistency if there are too many childcare issues. Positively they often bring a sensitivity and maturity to the process.'*

*'Challenges - last minute changes to already tight rehearsal schedules due to child/ren's sickness. Already tired/exhausted performer due to overnight parenting of sick child. Distraction when child/ren in rehearsals. Positives - constant reminder of 'normality' of life, grounding away from the work and the cocoons which we can build for ourselves.'*

*'Need to stick to tighter work schedule (with parents)'*

*'It can sometimes make impromptu meetings difficult.'*

The choreographers, director and managers who took part in the research clearly already had an interest in the issue as they had taken the time to respond, and there was a strong feeling that if they had not tackled the issue yet, it was something that they would need to do in the future, as part of their desire to support artists better as well as part of their responsibility as employers.

*'Although none of our dancers have children, most others in the company (Managers, Creative Learning team, and Technical Department) do. We endeavour to be a 'child-friendly' company even though there is little support to be one.'*

*'I don't have a written policy, but as a mother myself I would be very open to working with/employing mothers or fathers or pregnant dancers, but as yet it hasn't happened.'*

*'We aim to be flexible to the supportive needs of all company members. Currently I am the only one bringing up a child.'*

*'We have a reasonably healthy reserves fund the aim of which is to be able to support in the event of unforeseen circumstances or to cover maternity leave. (When I had my baby) there was no support or maternity leave for me and I wouldn't want anyone to have to go through that in a company under my direction.'*

*'We still have no dancers who are parents but think that this time next year it could be a very different picture....three dancers are planning families in 2009!'*

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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The responses received show how dance artists, companies and choreographers are addressing the challenges around pregnancy and parenthood creatively. Much credit is due to dancers and practitioners who juggle the peculiarities of a dance career in addition to the demands of parenthood, and to companies and choreographers who find a way to offer innovative support to pregnant artists and parents from within their limited resources.

Alongside this good news there was evidence of uncertainty and frustration, with dancers and companies/choreographers each being concerned about the needs and expectations of the other, feeling fearful of getting it wrong and guilty about their sense of their own limitations. With the subject of pregnancy and parenthood already so sensitive between (in the broadest sense) 'employee' and 'employer' it is hardly surprising that this is more keenly felt in a sector where issues around physicality, age and money are already heightened. The fact that parents who continue to have a career in dance are regularly noted as rarities by dancers and companies is testament to how difficult it is to maintain a dance career after having children.

It is worth remembering that not very many years ago the issue of employing women of childbearing age in any job was a contentious one. As recently as 1975 the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act and Employment Protection Act made it illegal to discriminate against women in education, recruitment and advertising or to sack a woman because she was pregnant. Such legislation is now firmly in place to protect women in employment, but the normality of freelance careers and short-term contracts in dance still leaves dancers vulnerable to missing out on work because of their circumstances.

Dancers and dance practitioners earn significantly less than the national average (Arts Council England Dance Mapping Research 2008/9), work long hours and frequently spend extended periods away from home in pursuit of their careers. Supporting dance artists through good employment practice is one way of helping them stay in their chosen career, rather than needing to look elsewhere for more secure work after just a few years. The issue of parenthood in dance links to the ongoing debate about mature artists, and the frequency with which dancers in their 30s – men as well as women – tend to disappear from the stage, whether replaced by younger performers or moving on to more secure work which fits with family life. Responses to this research confirmed that female dancers typically delay motherhood in order to prolong their performing career, but this need not be necessary with better support in place. Finding ways to really value performers over a period of years and continue to work with them as they mature could shift the norm in dance, to a situation where dancers don't feel that parenthood has to cut their career short in this way.

There are two kinds of recommendations that can be drawn from this research – those that can be put into practice straight away by choreographers and companies, and longer term challenges to tackle bigger issues within the sector.

To start making a difference immediately, there are several things that choreographers and companies can do to make sure they are family-friendly. Employers' concerns about being seen to single parents out for support over others are valid but it is also true that some of the most straightforward things choreographers and companies can do to help parents continue working can benefit everyone who works with them. It need not be just about dancers - respondents regularly referred to companies' administrative staff being parents even where few dancers in the company were, and

additional support benefits parents across the company, helping to become more family-friendly to all. Dance organisations could usefully the following:

- **Check compliance with statutory requirements:** Do check that you are doing everything you should be in terms of working with pregnant employees or parents. Appendix 2: Information & Guidance includes information about risk assessments, maternity and paternity leave, allowances and benefits.
- **Put written maternity and paternity policies in place:** Having a clear procedure in place before it is needed, reduces uncertainty and means parties are sure of their rights and responsibilities in advance. The discussion involved in creating a policy is useful in that possible means of support can be considered, refined and agreed before they are needed.
- **Maintain up to date information about support, legislation and benefits and make it available to all employees:** This will mean everyone is sure of their obligations and entitlements.
- **Take specialist advice about working with pregnant dancers:** Dance UK's Pregnancy & The Dancer information sheet contains Dancer specific information to supplement the general information given to women when pregnant.
- **Set regular working hours with meal breaks and appropriate rest and recovery time.** This is essential for pregnant performers or new mothers, but also reduces risk of injury in all dancers.
- **Set schedules in advance and stick to them as much as possible:** People understand that sometimes things have to change at the last minute but it should be possible to plan far enough ahead to enable childcare to be organised, making it easier for parents to work with you. This is also good practice in dance science terms enabling 'periodisation' and more effective preparation for performance (see Dance UK's Fit to Dance 2 and the Healthier Dancer Pages of Dance UK's website).
- **Consider flexible working models:** Making and touring work is intense and demanding but if the whole company isn't needed all the time, part-time work could be an option for those who want it, and could also make project budgets go further.
- **Help with networking:** Suggest parents in the company – not just the dancers - set up an informal group, or join forces with other companies or organisations locally to set up a group. Creating opportunities to share information is a way of helping with the sense of isolation that respondents reported, and by working together the group could, for example, negotiate better rates with a local childcare provider.
- **Cost additional support into budgets:** Extra cost versus limited budgets are major issues in a sector which is used to operating on a relative shoestring, but contributions to childcare and other means of support can be included in annual or project budgets if this is recognised as a priority. Companies who want to work with parents can choose to support their creative team with a contribution to the cost of regular childcare or with bringing a family on tour.

**- Explore other ideas:** The dancers who responded to the research recognise that companies and choreographers work to limited resources and, although help with childcare was the issue with which they said they could use the most support, this didn't mean they necessarily expected companies and choreographers to pay for it. Ideas such as setting up salary sacrifice schemes or making links with other organisations' childcare provision don't have big cost implications but are good ways of offering support in addition to statutory obligations.

**- Don't be afraid to ask:** Putting aside the fear and talking to each other is the simplest recommendation of all. Some things are really easy to resolve, if only you knew what was needed.

Staying with the theme of communication, the first action to be put in place as a result of this report will be the setting up of a network for dancing parents and pregnant dancers to seek advice, share ideas and find people locally to make contact with. This will be launched as an online forum in early 2010, initially inviting the participants in this research to join up and spread the word, and also publicising the forum via dance networks and in the specialist press.

There will be further discussions between Dance UK's members and funders to investigate how best to continue to develop this research. If you would like to be included in these consultations please contact Sally Brooker at Dance UK: [sally@danceuk.org](mailto:sally@danceuk.org)

The appendices to this report contain a wealth of information including 6 case studies in which practitioners, choreographers and companies share their experience, details of relevant legislation, employees' rights and employers' responsibilities, maternity and paternity leave, pay and allowances, and a breakdown of responses to research questionnaires.

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Photography: Charlotte Vincent