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GuiDANCE project: Formative evaluation of education on growth and maturation in the dance sector

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Overview of GuiDANCE

The GuiDANCE project (growing up in dance) is a collaboration between the University of Exeter (UoE), the Royal Ballet School (RBS), the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), and One Dance UK (ODUK) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). As a partnership, we aim to address the challenges associated with pubertal transition in dance for young people.

In so doing, we aim to equip the sector to better support healthy adolescent development within dance careers and to equip the next generation of dancers to manage sustainable careers.

We will do this by:

1. **educating key stakeholders in the dance sector about growth and maturation;**
2. **co-creating a best practice policy within a leading establishment;**
3. **co-creating an online resource with sector-wide bodies.**

The project has benefited from two advisory groups – a dance teacher advisory group (DTAG) and a vocational dance student advisory group (SAG) - who have helped to shape the project from the beginning. Each advisory group was made up of 4 individuals who volunteered time and expertise to the project. The DTAG worked with the project from the outset, helping to design all study materials, including survey and interview questions. The SAG joined later in the project, providing a sounding board for components of best practice and practical recommendations.

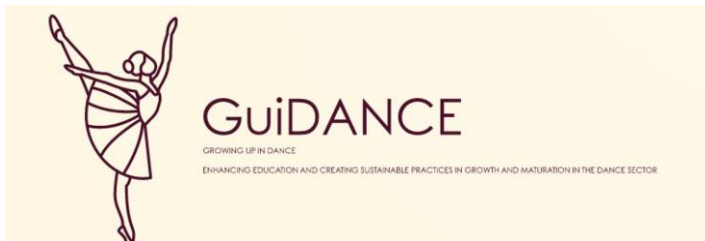
The project has also benefitted from a fantastic steering group of experts in this area, including Dr Megan Hill and Dr Tejal Patel.

The project involved several work packages involving different collaborators.

Work packages 1 and 2 were completed in partnership with the RBS, developing data and reviewing practices and protocols around growth and maturation at the school.

Work package 3, the focus of this report, was completed in collaboration with the RAD and ODUK. This work package involved a formative evaluation of education on growth and maturation in the dance sector using survey and interview methods, with a view to using the findings to inform the refinement of educational workshops on the topic and also to inform the development of best practice guidelines in the sector.

Work package 4 involved all collaborators coming together to co-create best practice guidelines for the dance sector.



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The project has focused on ballet training and ballet teacher education, however, the plan going forward is to broaden this out to encompass a more diverse range of dance involvement.

Findings

A UK-wide online survey was distributed between September 2021 and April 2022. The survey was based on the survey distributed via ODUK back in 2016. Questions for the survey were co-created with the dance teacher advisory group.

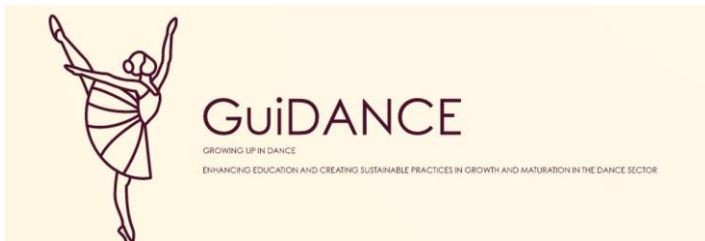
Overview of sample

- 77 participants completed the survey
- 85.7% female
- The ethnicity of survey respondents was predominantly White British (89.6%). 2.6% described themselves as Caribbean, 2.6% as Indian, 2.6% mixed or multiple ethnic background, 1.3% as Irish, and 1.3% as Turkish.
- Ages ranged from 21-76 (mean age of 45 years)
- The majority (75.6%) of respondents had been teaching 11+ years
- The most common age group taught (62.8%) was 10-18 years
- Respondents came from a range of teaching contexts: Private, vocational, secondary school, community, primary school, further education, higher education, teacher training, pre-vocational, and other
- 47.4% obtained their ITT qualification from RAD, 15.8% from BBO, the other 42% was made up of IDTA, RBS, ISTD, Northern Ballet School, Washington School of Ballet

Alongside the survey, interviews were conducted with dance teachers who had completed training on the topic of the growth and development in dance. Ten interviews were completed with a range of teachers from different teaching contexts, including recreational and vocational teachers, newly trained, and highly experienced teachers. All interviewees were female and all were ballet-focused in their teaching.

Overview of education in growth and maturation in the dance sector

Findings suggest that education in growth and maturation is not being satisfactorily achieved through initial teacher training and is instead being addressed through Continuing Professional Development (CPD). While CPD is important to fill gaps for those who have already completed initial teacher training (ITT), this space should also be used to build and advance training. Findings point to a lack of prioritisation of growth and maturation as a topic within ITT or CPD and subsequently, it is often not prioritised by teachers themselves or seen as essential. In interviews, teachers described a 'tick box' approach to CPD topics such as growth and maturation, rather than the topic being viewed as central or essential: "...you know CPD is seen by some teachers or somebody's got to tick...**just got to tick the box**...I think it's actually about finding teachers who want to develop their practice and grow their practice...so it's how you work with the reluctant, the unconverted". Similar views were



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reflected across the interviews conducted as part of the study and support the need for a change in the way CPD is viewed, not as a 'tick box' exercise, but as a way to grow and develop teaching practice.

Forty-eight percent of dance teachers who responded to the survey had not received any education or training on growth and maturation in their initial teacher training (compared to 59.5% in the original 2016 survey). This number improved slightly for those who had trained more recently, suggesting a small improvement.

Forty-three percent of respondents had attended CPD training on the topic of growth and development. Of those who had attended CPD training, 58.8% had already received education on this in their initial teacher training, 41.2% had not. This supports the need to provide this within CPD and also the need for a more in depth look at provision in current ITT. A significant proportion of those attending CPD had already had information about growth and maturation in their initial teacher training (ITT), which could suggest that inclusion of the topic in ITT helps teachers to see the topic as important and relevant to their teaching practice.

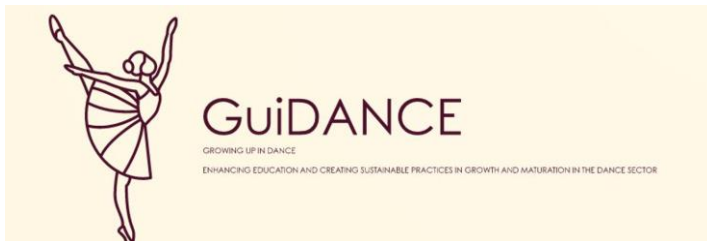
Eighty-two percent of respondents agreed this topic sits within their remit as a dance teacher. Some cited dance teacher involvement across childhood and into adolescence as underpinning this: "Dance teachers often have the unique position of teaching the same children all throughout their childhood and adolescence. This makes you a significant adult role model in their lives and in my view means you have a responsibility to assist in ensuring their social and emotional wellbeing alongside their physical development." Others reiterated the importance of seeing dance teaching as much more than just the technique and steps: "Dance is more than learning technique, routines and steps, dance is a community that brings us together through the art and we teach them through their most vulnerable years, particularly socially, so it is our duty to ensure that help them outside the classroom as well as within". However, it is important to note that this is a biased sample, in that respondents were targeted through partner organisations and therefore, may have had more exposure to the topic and training and may therefore view it as something that is firmly within their remit.

Summary of current picture

CPD provision currently focuses on the basics rather than more advanced practical application or theory.

Core aspects missing from ITT programmes

- ✓ Adolescent development (psychological)
 - "Child psychology was useful to a point, but it was very much based on children up to the age of 10."
- ✓ Physical growth and maturation at adolescence – implications for practice



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Recommended content for foundation education (to be covered in ITT)

- General child development (psychological) – developmental tasks and milestones
- Motor learning in childhood
- Introduction to adolescence – what does this encompass
- Physical changes at adolescence (puberty)
- Adolescent development (psychological) – developmental tasks and milestones
- Implications for wellbeing and teaching
- Basic skills for applied practice e.g. rehearsing approaches to conversations with students or parents

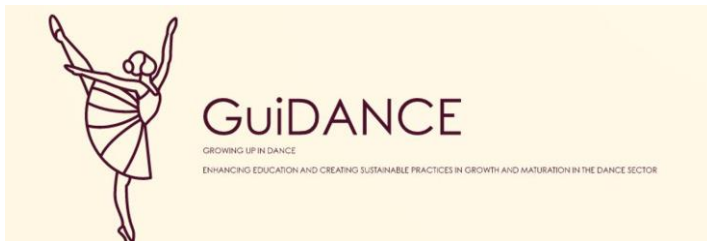
Recommended content for CPD training:

- Refresher on the basics/updates in the area
- Exploring topics and theory in greater depth
- Child development (psychological) advanced e.g. attachment theory, in depth look at social, emotional and cognitive development
- Physical changes at adolescence (puberty) – advanced e.g. maturity timing
- Adolescent development and mental health
- Sharing of practice
- Application and practical strategies – advancing skills
- Context specific training – recreational/vocational/community/school

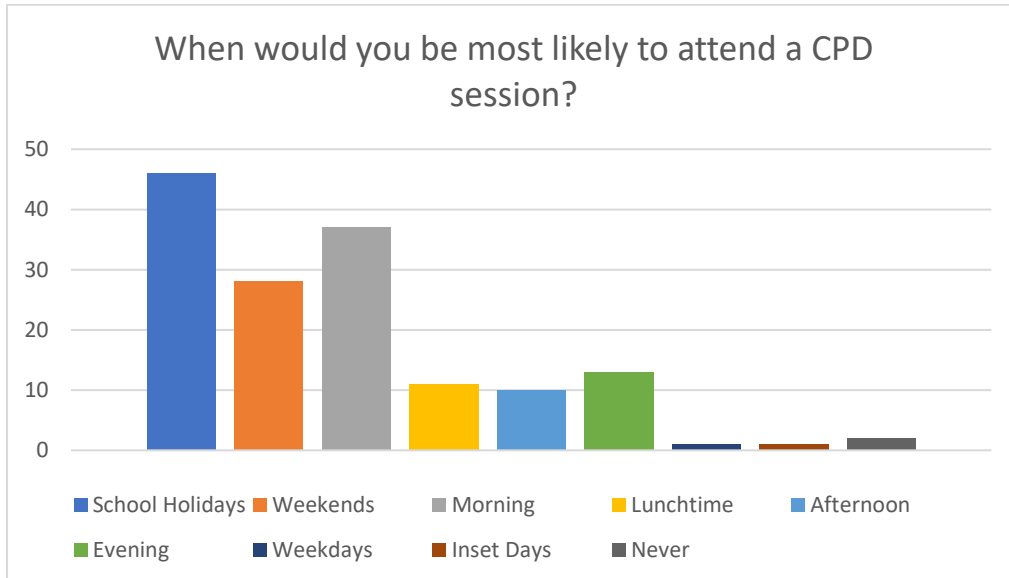
Barriers to training

Teachers commented that training on this topic “... was not always readily available, accessible or affordable”

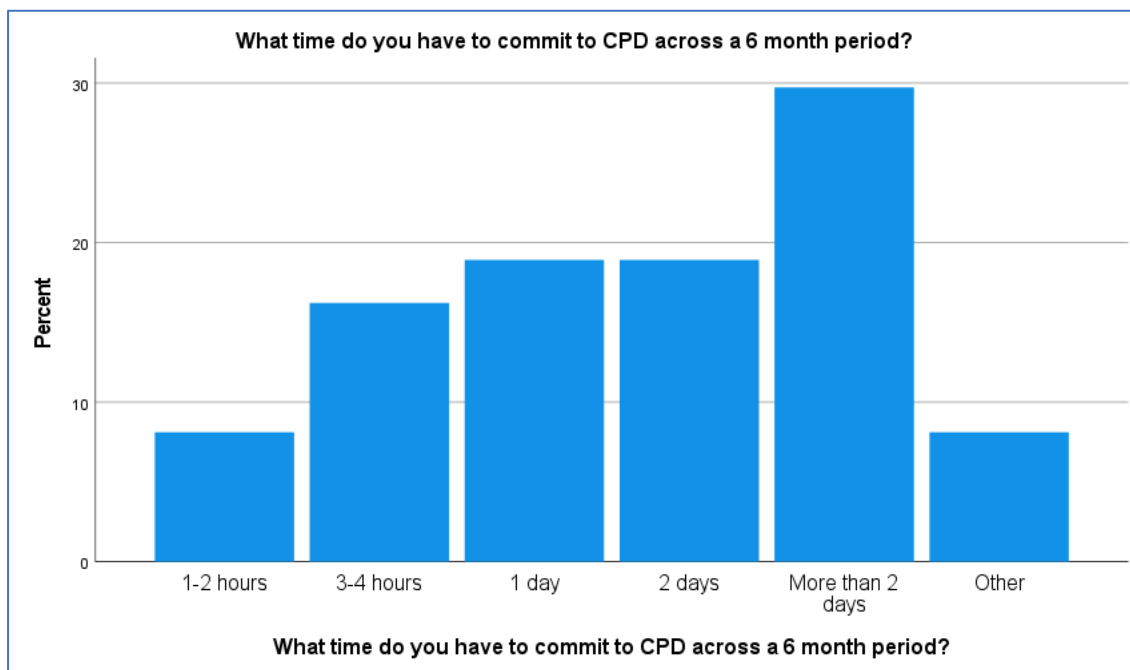
The biggest barriers to accessing training included amount of time available, cost, timing of training, and location or travel. Teachers reported being most likely to attend training in the school holidays or on weekends, with the most popular time of day for this to take place being in the morning.



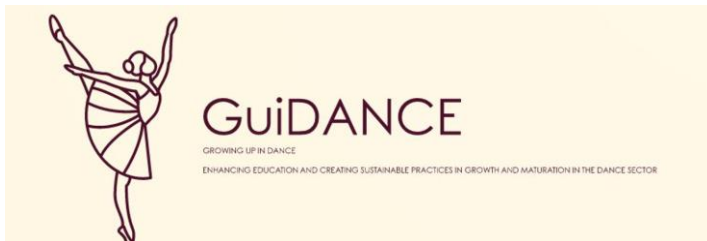
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When asked how much time they would have to commit to CPD across a 6-month period, the majority of respondents (29.7%) said more than 2 days.



The majority of respondents (58,8%) were willing to pay £10-50 per CPD session, 20.6% were willing to pay £50-75. Very few were willing to pay above this, though this depended on the length of training.



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Format of training

The majority of training sessions participants reported attending were one-off sessions (46.2%), or part of a series of sessions (30.8%).

“Courses I attended were often ‘one off’ events, **disconnected from each other** and often not widely advertised. It would be really good to have a series of wellness focused workshops (with online participation options) covering a full range of topics related to adolescent dancer wellness”

Sixty-two percent of respondents agreed that a one-off CPD session was not enough to facilitate changes in practice:

“I would like to [join a training course], however I don't believe one-hour online discussion or even a day would be enough. If I can afford the cost and time, I would like to read about this and learn through writing, getting feedback about what I have written, discussions and asking questions. This would need to be over some time.”

The most frequently cited training providers for this were RAD, ODUK and ISTD, however, this may be biased in relation to those who disseminated the survey link.

When asked how they would like the topics to be addressed, webinars were the most popular choice. However, respondents also raised the importance of variety. Stating that a variety of training formats are needed to cover all aspects of dance education and to reach as many teachers as possible as teachers “...all learn in different ways and have different schedules”.

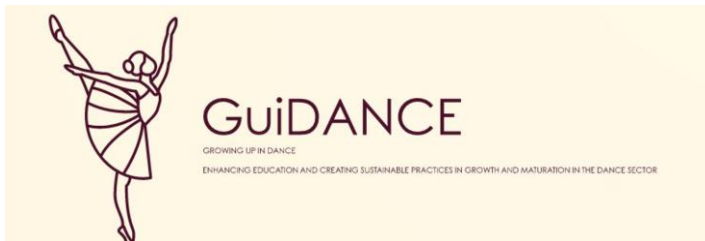
Training content

Content received by respondents during training attended was primarily knowledge or theory based. Sixty-four percent said the focus was on knowledge and 36% said focus was on both knowledge and skills. None of the participants indicated that the primary focus was on applied skills. When asked what the focus should ideally be on, all agreed both knowledge and applied skills should be covered.

The area the teachers felt most confident in was physical development, specifically examples such as managing a student who is struggling with flexibility, balance or coordination just after going through a growth spurt, where 62.8% felt they had the skills needed to manage this well.

The area the teachers felt least confident in was related to adolescent psychological development and mental health, specifically examples such as managing a student who is engaging in risk-taking behaviour, for which nearly 30% felt ill-equipped. This was also the topic which attracted the most interest in terms of further training; Seventy respondents (89.7%) expressed an interest in learning more about mental health and wellbeing at adolescence.

Training that respondents had attended focused largely on physical development and growth (46.7%) and, to a lesser extent, psychological wellbeing (13.3%). When describing this training, participants noted there was often a lack of content focus on psychological development and that it can be difficult to find a comprehensive, detailed, accessible, and affordable course on growth and



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development which includes both physical and psychological aspects. It is also the topic for which the most comprehensive training was deemed necessary, as 48.7% stated they would like further training in both knowledge and applied skills in relation to this topic.

Experiences of training were positive and many participants described the training as having an impact on their thinking.

“I remember going on to the course and thinking oh wow there's so much that I hadn't given a thought to, **it was an eye opener for me**“

“...the overarching theme about it was oh my God **I've just opened the door, what do I do now. So it felt very much like the beginning of a journey** in terms of increasing awareness. I think that it was one of those pieces of training, where you kind of went away and thought about it and went away and put certain things in action.“

“**It woke me up**...We can't afford not to be looking at this”

Application of knowledge

“**If you've gained the knowledge you are only successful if you have put your knowledge to use in the student and the student is better as a result.**”

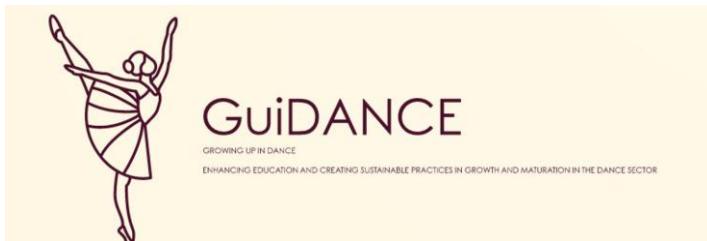
The application of knowledge from training was explored in interviews. Teachers described a number of clear examples of application of training to their teaching practice. These included changes to communication; noticing and understanding of students; teacher strategies; and the sharing of learning.

Communication encompassed communication with parents and students and increasing confidence in these interactions e.g. sending a letter to parents, starting a dialogue with students and providing them with greater autonomy through actions such as goal setting.

Teachers also described **noticing and understanding**: “I've always sort of done that, but now I understand.” For example, teachers described an increased awareness of maturity timing after training which helped them to understand and consider maturity in class groupings. Lots of teachers also described how helpful it was to understand the ‘why’ of adolescent behaviour.

Teacher strategies in response to the training were varied and included the following

- Changes to costuming/uniform e.g., moving away from thin strapped leotards; being more sensitive to physical change
- Emotion coaching e.g., using the dance class as an opportunity to teach children about different emotions and their expression
- Goal setting e.g., providing students with greater autonomy throughout adolescence with increasing input into their own goal setting
- Reflective practice e.g., teachers described using a reflective journaling practice to think more deeply about their students’ development and how they could promote it further



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A key application teachers talked about was their ability to **share the learning** they had done with other colleagues in their school and how they used their training to start a conversation with wider teams about the importance of growth and maturation: “I took all my notes and then I had an evening with my staff, my teachers, and we did 2 hours of going through what that was. I went through most of the notes and the slides and things, and then I and then we had good discussions. So **it was a really good launching pad for us** to then talk about things that it sparked.”

A summary of what works in teacher education in this area

General

- Access to expertise
- Provision or facilitation of networks for discussion
- Resources

Training content

- Opportunity for discussion with other teachers

“It was opened up for discussion, and it was a mixture of OK take this concept and reflect on your practice like what have you seen ‘Have you seen this?’ And it was **the ability to talk to your peers in a room...** You know it was **the ability to share stories and share experiences** and to hear how other people tackle things and how the language that people use...So that's really, really helpful because you always get a golden nugget from another teacher and you think, oh God, yes, that's what I need, I'm taking that. That's really helpful, and that sort of peer to peer exchange is really helpful.”

- Value of data, facts and theory

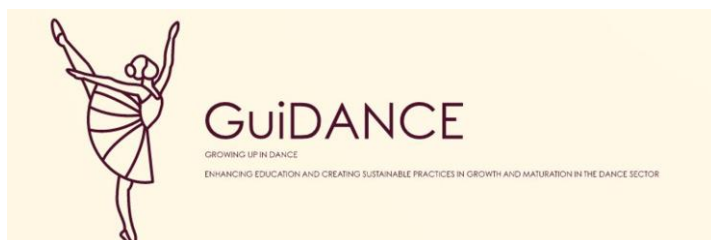
“...new information, then it means that **I can sit my practice on that.** You know certain that I can trust it, so that's helpful.”

- Challenges, tasks, and interactive methods

“...**it makes you think critically,** not just about that question, but about the other things as well. And the other thing it gave me was actually confidence that I was sort of roughly in the right place, you know.”

- Training that is specific to dance context

“And the other thing that was helpful is that... **it was given very firmly within the context of dance** not just general childhood, it was provided to dance teachers with a knowledge of how you interact with them and what you see in the studio, not just the general population...**it was targeted to my profession**”



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Recommendations and actions going forward/gaps to address



Where possible schedule training sessions in school holidays or on weekends, ideally in the morning.



Optimal price £10-50 (up to £75 if necessary) per training session



Consider use of advocate training to help schools with costs – 78.2% of respondents were interested in completing training as an advocate for their dance school or place of work.



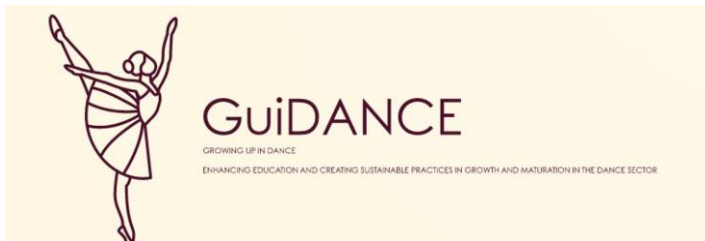
Provide a range of formats to engage teachers: webinars (live/pre-recorded); series in person; panel discussion or sharing of practitioner wisdom, videos, information sheets



Where 'one off' sessions are provided ensure a follow-up session is also scheduled ~ 6m later to allow time and space for reflection

The data suggest several key ways that we can improve the content of training:

- Integrate theory and application by having sessions which bring the two together.
- Integrate physical and mental aspects rather than addressing physical and psychological aspects as separate sessions or courses.
- Integrate growth and development with syllabus and other training; Growth and development is something which impacts across all aspects of dance, therefore this should be a bullet point in every single CPD course. This will also help teachers to understand its importance e.g. Intermediate syllabus with adolescent dancer session.
- Ensure psychological development and wellbeing is addressed fully, in particular mental health and wellbeing at adolescence.
- Utilise challenges, tasks, and interactive methods.
- Ensure training is specific to dance context and tailored to teaching setting e.g. recreational/vocational.
- Offer specific examples of practical application and opportunities to rehearse strategies e.g., having difficult conversations, dealing with parents, opportunity to rehearse approaches.
- Provide opportunities for discussion and networking.



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- Provide resources.

The data suggest several key ways that we can improve the format of training. Most notably this would be in relation to the length and structure of training, moving away from a 'one and done' model for CPD and instead utilising follow up sessions/series models and allowing space and time for reflection between sessions.

“...OK, now there's a follow up on what you learned.

How's it gone in application?

And where did you see the gaps?

Or here's some more information for you to think about...

I think that to me, that's true CPD because it's not just taking it away, it's then coming back and reassessing what you've learned through doing it”

Wrap around support was also an aspect which was highlighted, in particular opportunities for discussion and networking resources and support, and feedback.

Those who offer teacher training should provide opportunities for discussion and networking e.g., a network with additional access to expertise. Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents were interested in joining a network to stay up to date with developments in the area of growth and development in dance.

In addition, further resources and support should be considered. Suggestions included regional advocates, notes and materials to accompany sessions, and a repository of resources and information.

Providers who ask for evaluation post-training need to be conscious of ensuring this feedback is fully utilised and implemented where suitable. Teachers felt they provided feedback which was not listened to or responded to. Using a model of pre- and post-evaluations could help to tailor training and ensure teacher satisfaction with training.

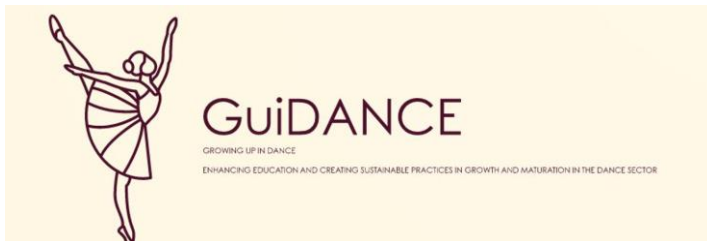
Other recommendations included addressing parent and student education on the topic of growth and development. With 79% of respondents agreeing it would be beneficial for the parents of their students to have more knowledge about growth and development and 96% of respondents agreeing it would be beneficial for their students to have more knowledge about growth and development.

Going forward there are a few things to be aware of in order to ensure the success of training in this area. These are illustrated in the following participant quotes:

“...making learning sessions accessible and affordable and **promoting the value** of such sessions for the development of teaching practice and dance student wellness”

“I think it absolutely has to be part of your initial training in it's so important, and **it gives you the opportunity to talk to talk about the dancer as a person not somebody who you're instructing.** “

“[there needs to be] an understanding of maturation as one of the **core pillars of teaching children**”



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Key things which will underpin the success of education in this area going forward



NEEDS TO BE A CORE PILLAR OF ITT



PRIORITISATION BY TEACHER TRAINING ORGS AND SUBSEQUENTLY, TEACHERS



NEEDS ADDRESSING ACROSS THE SECTOR E.G., UNIVERSITY PGCE



MORE RESEARCH