

# Resource and support guide

## Boys in dance

Dance can be a powerful way to engage students, including boys. There are many benefits of taking part in dance:

- physical fitness and control
- as a means of expression and communication
- encourages teamwork and self-reflection
- improves self-discipline and self-confidence.

We've created this resource to help you to engage boys in dance. It features articles and blogs from successful male dancers, as well as quotes from current and past GCSE and A-level Dance students:

- Video interview with Philip King.
- Choreographer James Cousins shares his experience of studying dance at school.
- Dance teacher Alison Clinton at Northampton School for Boys, shares her pupils' experiences of taking GCSE and A-level dance.
- Dr Chris Marlow shares his passion for dance.
- Rambert dancer, Archie White, talks about his experience of dance at school and his career.

We hope that the information shared within this guide helps to engage and encourage more boys at your school to take formal qualifications in dance. Please feel free to use the quotes, images and video at open evenings and in lessons.

## Philip King



Philip King, a former A-level Dance student, gives advice on how to overcome adversity in the classroom.

Hear how he went from being the only male in his dance class at school to having a career with some of the biggest dance companies, performing across the world. Press 'ctrl and click' on the image for the video to play.

## James Cousins



Read about choreographer James Cousins' experience of dance when he was at school.

I'd always been really drawn to dance, seeing dance on Top of The Pops, backing dancers to pop stars and Riverdance. I was always excited by the power of dance but never did it. Then, when I went to secondary school, fortunately dance was part of PE. It was only 6 weeks, but it was useful as there was less

judgement: everyone did it therefore everyone was equal in that. It wasn't that the boys did rugby and the girls did dance, so there was already an acceptance of dance in my school. Since I loved it in PE I decided to go along to an after-school club. From there I chose to study GCSE and A-level dance at school. As well as the practical, I also enjoyed the theory about dance works and Laban's notion, which was quite mathematical and something that wasn't included in the after-school clubs. In dance outside of the curriculum we had dances created for us, whereas GCSE and A-level gave me the opportunity to create and choreograph my own movements.

When I look back and think... I was awful when I started, terrible! I remember the first steps I learnt were so simple, but it took me weeks and weeks to master them. I loved the challenge of it. I think it was also great music, the joy of moving rhythmically and in time with music, which appealed to me initially.

I did face bullying during my time at school and was picked on for doing dance. A couple of years above me some of the 'rugby boys' had chosen GCSE dance, so it became slightly more accepted by peers. But dance, the lessons, the clubs, and the people became a little sanctuary; I felt I totally belonged in that dance studio, there was such a nice community there. The community built in a dance studio is unlike any other. You form amazing bonds because of the trust required in creation and the vulnerability you have to show. There was so much support and nurturing so the other stuff didn't matter – or allowed me not to worry about it. I guess also, by being able to take a lot of lessons and get involved in clubs and performances, I became good at it and then they couldn't really bully me! None of my friends from school did the after-school clubs but I made a new group of friends in the dance classes and as I went through school, they became a really important part of my school time.

## GCSE AND A-LEVEL DANCE – RESOURCE AND SUPPORT GUIDE – BOYS IN DANCE

While the dance department were incredibly supportive, I didn't feel this from other teachers or the wider school; it felt like they weren't interested as I wasn't going down the typical UCAS route and they couldn't understand how to support non-traditional pathways.

I do remember an English teacher who, because she enjoyed dance, would ask about performances which felt nice to have the support from other areas, even just by a simple question.

I know I was very lucky to be at a school where it had 'Excellence in Dance.' However, it was by chance that I ended up there; there were three schools in the area, and the other two were closer to me. If I'd gone to the other schools, which didn't have dance, I may not be where I am today. I appreciated that my school worked to be able to offer A-level by teaming up with another school and running it from 2:30pm to after school rather than squeezing it in as extra-curricular. If a school doesn't offer something, how will a student ever find out if it is their thing? That's the worry when schools can't run a class for only three students. Do it for those three kids - you have no idea what it could mean to them.

Having the chance to try dance at school gave me the foundation to study it at a higher level at London Contemporary Dance School. After graduating and performing for a number of years, I focused on my love of choreography and have since toured the world creating work with my company as well as choreographing, directing and staging a number of dance works, theatre shows, musicals and commercial adverts.

I have taken a route into the dance world, but I know that studying dance offers so many more skills to enable students to pursue a number of pathways. From my dance class, my peers have also gone on to be lawyers, lecturers, choreographers and accountants! In the same way we know that other subjects offer transferable skills, schools need to appreciate the wider benefit of dance. For A-levels, I did Maths and I'm not an accountant, I did French and I'm not a linguist, but things I learnt in those subjects do benefit who I am and my career today.

It may seem obvious how the skills from dance have helped me, but dance also teaches teamwork skills, non-verbal communication, creative thinking, problem solving, project management, trust, analytical skills and self-observation. The physical presence and awareness that comes from dance is invaluable for anyone who presents in people-facing jobs, be that on TV, in an office, in a classroom or one-to-one with patients.

I think the current syllabus is brilliantly designed and has a lot of space for students' creativity, analysis, and progression. I know teachers are under a lot of pressure to get grades, but I hope they can allow space in the lessons for it not to be a spoon-fed subject and to remember it is creative – there are no right or wrong answers. That is what I find wonderful about going into schools and delivering workshops – I'll ask a question about *Within Her Eyes* and students say something that I'd never seen before. People can see dance in so many different ways, that's the beauty of it.

To boys considering studying dance, I would say do it! Or even *try* it. As well as the skills I already mentioned, dance is joyful, it's creative, it's physical but in a totally different way to other sports – it challenges your body to perform, be articulate and be in touch with different qualities (and you can't ignore it gives you great moves on the dance floor!).

To teachers, I would say get other teachers to realise how dance can work in conjunction with their subjects and students' other pathways.

## GCSE AND A-LEVEL DANCE – RESOURCE AND SUPPORT GUIDE – BOYS IN DANCE

To parents, be supportive and let them explore – and don't fear a non-traditional career pathway. Dance will open your child's perspective on things, it will inform them and make them think in a unique way.

You can read more about [James Cousins and his work](#).

[James Cousins Company offer half day and full day workshop](#) for schools.

**Photograph:** Cousins leading a workshop for students, Photography by Camilla Greenwell.

## Northampton School for Boys

Boys, past and present, share their stories of studying dance.



"Teaching boys dance is always driven by finding challenge. Boys love a challenge and finding ways to enhance their energy and physicality is key. Once they connect with dance, their enthusiasm to improve follows, and this is where the technique comes in! They suddenly see the purpose of technique class and can link the fundamentals of this to their work."

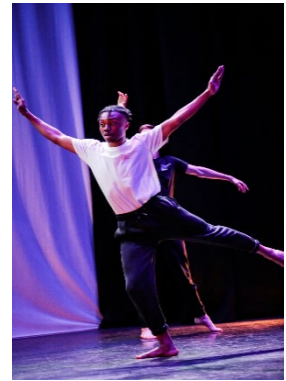
**Alison Clinton**; Teacher of Dance at Northampton School for Boys.

"Dance provides me with a release from everyday life. When stuff gets too stressful or frustrating, I find that dance is what unlocks the peace in those moments."

**Carter Pritchard** took GCSE and A-level Dance and is now in full time dance training at Wilkes Academy.

"For me personally, dance has always been the way in which I feel like I can express myself best, so being able to do GCSE and A-level at school not only gave people like me the fair opportunity to present my knowledge physically, but it also challenged me to explore new ways to choreograph and perform which I still use now in my current training."

**Silvio Dzapasi** took GCSE and A-level dance and has now gone on to train at Wilkes Academy. He was recently on the BRIT Awards as a singer/dancer for DAVE.

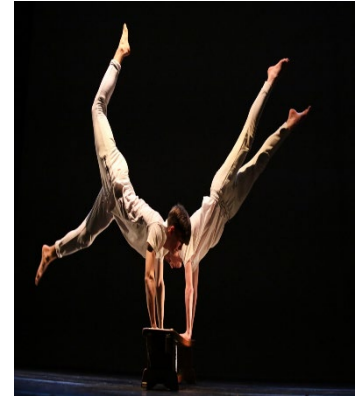


"Dance was a good choice for me because I always enjoyed sports and being athletic but also enjoyed creative subjects. Taking dance allowed me to combine the two. Dance also allowed me to meet my closest friends and others who shared the same passion."

**Henri Berry** took GCSE and A-level Dance. He was also a basketball player for the school. He has gone on to study a Criminology and Forensics degree.

## GCSE AND A-LEVEL DANCE – RESOURCE AND SUPPORT GUIDE – BOYS IN DANCE

"I can definitely say that Dance A-level has had a great impact on who I am, not just as a student but also as a person. Dance has instilled in me, through the performance aspect, the ability to confidently be who I am and know I am capable of presenting myself as a strong individual. But it has also taught me cognitive skills like evaluation and analysis of the impacts of one event on another – it is these more abstract skills which I view as the most valuable impact of dance as a subject. Aside from that, purely from a recreational perspective, dance as an athletic art form has allowed me to constantly work out whilst also release my emotions which is something I don't think I could have found in any other typical sport."



**Cian Johnstone** Law student at UCL who took GCSE and A-level Dance.

"I enjoy dance as it gives me a platform to express my body freely. Dance benefits me as it helps me improve skills that I can use outside of dance like stamina and strength."

**Jermaine Collison** Year 11 student, studying GCSE Dance.



"GCSE Dance gave me the foundation and love for the start of my dance career. I'm now in full-time professional training. GCSE dance did so many things for me from teaching me the foundations of styles, to analysing aspects of performance to just the art form in general, it's all so beautiful and is now my life. Doing GCSE and A-level Dance has definitely helped me with not only my performing but also my teaching and choreography; it set my mind free to create and learn the skill set I need to be able to teach others my ideas and choreography which is a huge part of my life now as it is my job to teach and choreograph as a self-employed dancer."

**Gio Bordone** a past student who studied GCSE and A-level Dance. He is currently in his third year of dance training at Addict Dance Academy.

## Dr Chris Marlow, Associate Lecturer, Lancaster University

**'Beyond its intrinsic artistic and technical skills, studying dance will develop in students a valuable range of transferable skills.'**



When studying dance, students become confident communicators and presenters who can engage an audience; they learn to listen with precision and possess an attention to detail, enabled by a strong work ethic grounded in physical fitness. Dance students are rarely complacent; instead, they are self-aware and self-motivated, receptive to critique/direction, eager to improve and consistently reflective. The discipline of dance demands focussed application; its students are reliable and creative individuals, equally happy working singly and in teams. Moreover, dance nurtures both creativity and problem solving,

borne out of a dancer's flexible mindset, where adaptability and improvisation become second nature. It is, therefore, unsurprising that dance students find success in a range of fields, since high achievement is their goal. In short, dance develops the skills for a fulfilling and successful life.

The skills I acquired during my own dance training have lasted a lifetime and I draw on them every day. I am forever grateful for them.

## Archie White

**Read about Archie White's experience of dance whilst at school. He is now a dancer for Rambert.**



I always had an interest in theatre and art, but I didn't start dance until I was age 15. I studied GCSE Dance with very little technical training or performance experience and limited knowledge of the dance world. I remember being introduced to dance in my PE lessons, having loved taking part in the creative tasks offered. At GCSE I loved getting an insight into how professional works were made and being able to learn the original choreography. As part of the A-level I was able to choreograph shows at the school and also create solo and group dances to be assessed.

Initially, I struggled being the only boy in the class and felt insecure executing movements that were not stereotypically masculine. Dance is still seen as feminine which can discourage boys from studying dance due to concerns about the assumptions your peers will make. Finding a male dancer who inspires you and you can relate to – whether that's in terms of race, body type, movement style – provides a sense of reassurance that there is a place for you in the dance world. Exposing boys in schools to dance performances and sharing online videos can help boys understand a male dancer is not just a boy in tights! Ultimately, representation within the dance world is fundamental in inspiring boys to dance.

One adversity I faced while studying was the lack of uptake of dance at GCSE and A-level. Dance is still undervalued compared to other subjects, therefore there is always a looming threat of arts subjects being cut from the curriculum. At both GCSE and A-level my class sizes

## GCSE AND A-LEVEL DANCE – RESOURCE AND SUPPORT GUIDE – BOYS IN DANCE

were very small. Luckily, my school had very committed dance and drama staff who encouraged the importance of the arts. I was privileged to have an incredibly supportive dance teacher, as well as the drama faculty, who pushed me to explore, create and become more educated about the dance world.

Often boys come to dance later than girls, so when starting a boy can feel they're too late or behind. As someone who was considered a 'late starter' I often felt anxious about needing to catch up with my peers. To boys unsure of whether to study dance, I would say you're not alone and it's never too late to start. Especially doing the GCSE and A-level, just remember you are studying to learn and you don't need to be an expert already! If you want to experiment, create and better understand the dance world then studying the GCSE and A-level will always be valuable. Through studying, my confidence increased, I became better at making creative decisions and learnt to be adaptable when working in a team.

Alongside A-level Dance I also studied at Trinity Laban CAT Scheme and toured with the National Youth Dance Company. From finishing at sixth form, I went on to study my BA in Ballet and Contemporary Dance at Rambert School. After three years studying, I joined junior company Rambert2 and since January 2022 have been working with the main company at Rambert. With the company I have performed a variety of works, dance theatre, ballet, contemporary, installation performances, music videos and live streams.

To boys considering studying dance, I would encourage watching as many different styles and performances as you can to figure out what inspires you and the dance you feel represents you. Find the movement you connect to and play!