

Resource and support guide

Inclusivity in dance

Dance can be a powerful way to engage students. 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 demonstrate that all students can access dance and to show that disability need not be a barrier. It features articles and blogs from successful disabled dancers, as well as quotes from current and past GCSE and A-level Dance students:

- Creative artists from Anjali Dance Company talk about their experiences with dance; how it has enriched their lives and become their careers.
- Hear from a teacher and her student about a strategy they implemented to support access.
- Hear from Vicky Malin who presents top tips for teachers.
- Find out about Rambert's new digital platform for teaching key stage 3-5 dance and hear from former Rambert dancer Musa Motha.
- Two-part Q&A: Then and Now with Laura Jones from Stopgap Dance Company.

We hope that the information shared within this guide helps to encourage more inclusive dance at your school. Please feel free to use the quotes, images and videos at open evenings and in lessons.

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Anjali Dance Company

Creative artists from Anjali Dance Company talk about their experiences with dance; how it has enriched their lives and become their careers.



Daisy Garrett

“Everyone needs to see that people with learning disabilities have a talent to dance when given the opportunity.”

I’m Daisy and I’ve been a professional dancer with Anjali Dance Company since 2010. I have Down’s Syndrome, Nystagmus and mild dyslexia; I’m a person like anybody else.

Dance has always felt natural to me, and I first started dancing when I was 3 years old. I attended Hardenhuish School, a mainstream secondary school in Wiltshire, where I took AQA GCSE Dance. I remember taking modules in performance,

choreography and dance appreciation...my highlight when I look back is my solo based on the theme of dolphins!

The practical parts of the course were amazing, they were a chance for me to express myself through my own choreography and to make my own creative choices. People sometimes underestimate my abilities, but dance allows me to bring out my inner spirit, connect with other people and share my story. If you have a disability, dance is also a way of showing the opposite side to the challenges... a way of showing the happiness, the beauty and the creativity.

I passed my GCSE Dance qualification and went on to study dance at college at A-level standard. I was proud to represent the course as student representative and it was my dance education training that led me to successfully audition for Anjali Dance Company.

As a professional dancer with Anjali Dance Company, I have toured to prestigious venues throughout the UK and beyond, with performances in Mexico and Barcelona. I have worked with leading choreographers such as Lea Anderson and Gary Clarke and often co-teach workshops to people of all ages and abilities. I have also starred in a film called ‘From Me,’ which premiered in April 2022 and was selected for a film festival in Broadway, New York. With good support I can achieve a lot and the key is taking the time to understand my needs so I can achieve excellence. I would recommend to others some of the support my teachers put in place that helped me:

- Breaking down tasks into pieces that are more manageable (eg for my solo, my teacher helped me explore the theme first, then try some movement, then pick my music. It was done in stages).
- Use of videos that I could watch outside of classes.
- Written documents that use colour coding (avoid lots of bright clashing colours) and simple language.
- Clear timeframes for tasks that do not change, avoiding last minute stress and rushing.
- Experiencing the exam conditions in the lead up to exams to avoid feelings of anxiety and overwhelm; if I have experienced the environment before, I can do my best.

My recent access rider has had the biggest impact on my learning; it is a document that includes information about your relevant medical conditions and access needs. For example, I ask for larger print on any handouts due to my Nystagmus. It would have been perfect for my dance education as my teacher(s) would have known from the start what I needed to reach my highest potential.

My advice to anyone with disabilities is to create your own access rider so you can feel confident that what you need will be in place. Or you could co-write one with your teacher(s) as a way of getting to know each other.

To anyone who wants to study dance, be true to who you are and go for it! Whether you have a disability or not, it doesn't matter. Disability is a superpower and dance will show others what you are capable of.

Teachers, my advice is to focus on ability, not disability. Take the time to understand and apply what people need to do their best. It could change people's lives, like mine, and give them a future they didn't realise was possible!

See Daisy's showreel here: <https://vimeo.com/737691458/b6b9a70ff6>

Watch more about Daisy's story here: <https://vimeo.com/699408233>

See the [Access rider template](#).



Nick McKerrow

"I love dancing since I was a child. It helps me be free and open, and easy to express my feelings."

Find out more about Nick here: <https://vimeo.com/699445293>



Lauren Payne

"I love to dance. I feel happy and I get emotional when people like it."

Lauren took GCSE Dance.

See her perform and talk about her dance journey here:

<https://vimeo.com/699439096>



Holly Riseborough

"Dance is my passion. It makes me feel free."

Holly studied Performing Arts at College for five years, completing the first year of a BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Dance.

See Holly dance and listen to her talk here:

<https://vimeo.com/737896718>

Northgate High School

Hear from a teacher and her student about a strategy they implemented to support access.



“My name is Rachael Harris. I currently teach at Northgate High School in Norfolk and I have been a GCSE Dance teacher for 15 years. In all of that time I have only had one experience of a student struggling to access the course fully. In my current Year 11 cohort I have a student with ASD and specifically auditory sensitivities.

When starting to deliver my lessons teaching the set phrases to the class, she became distressed by the sound of the regular ticking of the metronome that is required to keep the rhythm and accuracy of timing for this assessment. After contacting AQA and speaking with my NEA adviser, we tried a number of strategies in class to help support this performance element.

We tried using a visual metronome, different pitches of sounds and even a live metronome where a teacher hit a block at 105bpm. None of these worked for my student. That was when we tried simply using ear plugs while performing. Although it hindered her ability to hear the rhythm with clarity, it meant that she could perform in the room with the metronome as the specification requires.”

Paige

“When I first heard the metronome, it really hurt my head. I felt overwhelmed and it created a ringing in my ear. It was very uncomfortable. As a solution, I was able to wear my ear defenders in my lessons and for the assessment which dampened the noise and made it less uncomfortable. I also used the strategy of humming very quietly whilst performing my set phrase as a distraction from the sound.”



Vicky Malin



Vicky is a disabled dancer, teacher and choreographer with over twenty years' experience in the sector.

[Listen to her top tips for teachers in order to make dance accessible to all.](#)

Claire Cunningham piece "Thank You Very Much".

Photo: Sven Hagolani

Rambert Classroom



Rambert Classroom is Rambert's new digital platform for teaching key stage 3-5 dance, with resources that teachers can use to help support and foster inclusivity in their classrooms. In this [Rambert Classroom video](#), former Rambert dancer Musa Motha talks through what he thinks teachers should expect, and prepare for, when working with students with a disability.

Musa Motha, former Rambert dancer in "Cerberus" by Ben Duke.

Photo: Camilla Greenwell

Stopgap Dance Company

Laura Jones, Co-Artistic Director



Artificial Things (2014) Amy Butler, Laura Jones and David Willdridge. Photo: Chris Parkes

Laura started her training at a dance school, aged five, as well as doing dance with her family sharing their love for folk dancing. Laura continued her dance training whilst growing up, deciding to take A-level Dance as one of her subjects. However, just one week into the course, Laura sustained a spinal cord injury, meaning she spent the next year in hospital, and faced the decision on her return to college about whether to continue with Dance.

In 2001, Laura went on to become the first wheelchair user to complete 100% of the AQA A-level Dance syllabus.

This two-part Then and Now Q&A, firstly shares Laura's reflections on taking A-level Dance, and secondly offers advice based on her extensive experience as a professional dancer and advocate for inclusive dance.

Part one: Then...

Q: After your injury and when you decided you wanted to continue with dance, who supported you during this decision and did anyone try to put you off?

A: It took me a little bit of time to work out whether it was something I wanted to do because it was going to be a very different experience than before, dancing in a disabled body, and I wasn't sure if I was still going to get the same enjoyment, but I gave it a go and I did. It was a lot of re-learning and a very new body to be dancing in, but I was really pleased to still be dancing.

My two tutors from college were very influential. They encouraged me to come back and were positive that we could make it work, even though they didn't know exactly how. My family were really supportive too.

The resistance I experienced came from some of my medical professionals, particularly the physiotherapists, who were sceptical as to whether dance was something I should be doing,

or whether I'd be strong enough. I am really glad I didn't let them put me off trying. I don't want to advocate not listening to medical advice, but I felt like they had quite a narrow perception of what dance was. And ultimately, it's been beneficial for both my mental and physical wellbeing as I am definitely more physically fit from dancing, and through getting to know my body, which also helps me in my everyday life. Plus of course, I have a successful career from it, lasting over 20 years.

Q: What strategies did you and your teachers put in place to support you?

A: We had to work it out, bit by bit, as to how to best tackle the curriculum. As I was the first wheelchair dancer to do 100% of the course, we did what we thought would work and kept seeking advice. The crucial factor was the communication between me and my tutors, and the exam board. Not everything was able to be done within the main lessons, so thankfully we were able to fit in some extra 1:1 sessions to allow a more bespoke approach to certain parts of the practical elements of the course. We also had some workshops with external experts in inclusive dance, and this was when I first met Vicki Balaam (Stopgap's founder).

We had to make adjustments to the set studies repertoire, for example timing, as it wasn't physically possible for me to do everything to the set counts, because, for example, it takes a lot longer to turn when in a wheelchair than standing. I did what I could and then we found ways to adapt the rest. Stopgap now refers to translating movement, but at the time adapting was all we knew.

Q: What adversities did you have to overcome?

A: I struggled initially with fatigue, sometimes falling asleep in class, as I was still in recovery, and due to some of the medication I was on. There were numerous challenges with co-ordinating my morning care and mini-bus collection just to get me to college on time.

Understanding the bigger picture surrounding someone's disability is really important, as it's not just what goes on within the classroom. This routine took time to put in place with the council and my carers. I was also given student support, which gave me the security I needed when at college.

The positive attitude that my teachers had, helped in terms of my peers, as they accepted me as a diverse dancer, and in some situations even advocated for me. However, as the only dancer with a difference, the only dancer in a wheelchair, I did feel isolated at times and singled out. I didn't always feel catered for, or that things were relevant to me. That is part of the reason the 1:1 sessions were so important.

Also, I was using quite a heavy wheelchair to start with, which was tough work to dance in. For the second year, I got a lightweight wheelchair with adjustable wheels to improve manoeuvrability. This made quite a difference.

Q: What advice would you give your 17-year-old self, knowing what you do now?

A: Be curious, be bold and explore your possibilities. Know that what you're doing is good enough. It's not about what other people can do, and comparing yourself to them, as that way things become focused on what you can't do. It's about focusing on what you can do, and what is interesting or unique about your own physicality. Appreciate the possibilities that you have.

I would definitely still tell myself to take A-level Dance and I would advise myself to be bolder. When you already feel like you are the "other" person, then you try not to bring any more attention to that or to yourself. However, having the confidence to ask more questions to gain

a better understanding of what is being asked is really important, particularly if you feel it doesn't fit your own way of moving, physicality or way of learning.

Q: What pieces of encouragement would you give to a disabled young person, wanting to study dance?

A: Again, explore and be curious. There are definitely many more examples of professional disabled and diverse dancers now, and there's so much more information on the internet, so explore because it can feel a bit lonely. It's important to find other people who have been through similar experiences and can show you examples of the things you can achieve. Find role models of disabled dancers, as when I studied, there was certainly a lack of these.

Part two: Now...

Q: What are your top tips for young disabled dancers and their dance teachers?

- Always open up a two-way conversation – as the teacher, you have the understanding of the syllabus and the skills, but as the disabled dancer you are the expert in your body. So, it is always about opening up the conversation and exploring things together.
- Appreciate that young dancers are likely to still be growing and changing physically. Find ways together to support that curiosity, to discover new things and keep learning. For example, if mobility aids and dance tools change, each time this will have an impact and new learning will take place.
- Share the intention of your movement. Translation of a movement may be needed and there needs to be the understanding that it's ok that the movement might not look the same as the non-disabled dancers' versions. What's important is that the intention and goal behind the movement is shared and worked towards. Even better, if possible, don't always start from the point of view of a non-disabled body. Can you think about specific skills from the disabled dancer's point of view, that the others then have to translate? This supports the idea of learning to master your own body, rather than just trying to re-create shapes that someone else is doing.
- Not everyone has all the answers – and that's ok. It's also ok to be honest about your limitations. Look for outside support, as there is so much more available now. Find positive role models and explore diversity in dance together, making it an opportunity to develop your dance practice with fresh ideas.
- Never fit into a mould or compare to the others in the classroom. It's not about who can kick their leg the highest - for a few individuals with a specific physicality and talent, that will see them through - but for the majority, it is about creativity, embodiment, and expression, as well as all of the transferable skills that dance offers.
- Aim for excellence.

Q: What adversities do you still encounter as a professional dancer?

People still sometimes assume that dance is not for disabled people, or that disabled people can't be professional dancers. I still encounter the attitude that, if I'm dancing, it must just be a hobby! To present a different opinion, I engage in dialogues about the possibility of inclusion and rigour.

Also, there's the assumption that it's the disabled dancer's responsibility to make all the adjustments and it's up to them to figure out what their translation is. The disabled dancer is already often responsible for remembering all of their versions of the dance, when all the other dancers are just getting to copy the teacher/choreographer. I encourage in my teaching, that it should be a shared responsibility, finding ways that instructions are relevant and supportive to all in the class.

Q: What are your recommendations for further guidance about creating inclusive dance?

A: Stopgap's Home Practice videos which are all on our YouTube channel, will be really useful for learning more about inclusive dance practices such as translation.

There's also Stopgap's resources for Artificial Things which are specific to the GCSE specification.

Finally, for teachers, we run an annual teacher training called Seedbed, which you can find the information for again on our website.

www.stopgapdance.com/production/artificial-things

<https://www.stopgapdance.com/learn-and-practice/dance-teachers-and-artists/inclusive-dance-and-iris-teacher-training/seedbed/>

Interview conducted in June 2023 by Laura Jones (Co-Artistic Director) and Belinda Preston (Creative Learning Manager) of Stopgap Dance Company.