

**Technical Paper No. 52**

**D&DA Award Scheme: Flexible Provision Projects 2004-5**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

DfES instigated a number of initiatives during the second three year phase of the project, in response to ongoing concerns regarding the continuing under representation of disabled students in professional dance and drama training, and the recommendation of the evaluation team that a specific objective during this period should be to establish how the Awards are changing access to disabled students and students with special educational needs.

Guidance for D&DA providers issued in the light of these concerns acknowledged that schools are at different stages of addressing the practicalities of integrated training and highlighted the need for preparing schools by building bridges: linking providers' expertise in dance, drama and stage management with that of those engaged in inclusive working practices. Accordingly, a series of three partnership training projects was commissioned with employers of disabled performers. These projects were: 'Missing Piece 4', run by Graeae Theatre Company, 'Staging Change' offered by Mind The Gap and the Foundation Course in Dance, provided by CandoCo, and these three projects are the subject of this evaluation.

### **Evaluation approach**

The aim of the evaluation was to investigate the effectiveness of the three projects in relation to the detailed terms of reference agreed with DfES, covering background, aims and objectives, marketing and recruitment strategy, timescale for development and delivery, detailed activities, measurement of progress, dissemination and reporting processes. It was decided to focus on the following themes, which provide the main text headings and from which conclusions and recommendations are derived:

- Course management and delivery in the areas of
  - Recruitment
  - Audition
  - Practical and pastoral student support
  - Course design
  - Approaches to teaching
- Interaction and partnerships with providers
- Dissemination of teaching and learning practices
- Student outcomes and progression
- Legacy from the projects

Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 give a short description of the three projects.

A total of 21 visits were made to consider the range of experiences offered to the students on each project: visits to early progress meetings, to observe the training in progress, to workshops, rehearsals and performances. The visits gave the opportunity for discussion of aims and objectives with appropriate members of staff at the companies, with school tutors engaged in delivery of the course material, and with the students, all of whom agreed to give their views. Where face to face interviews could not be arranged because of pressures of time, visits were followed up by telephone interviews.

The anonymity of contributors to this evaluation has been preserved as promised to them. Pseudonyms have been used for the students for the sake of clarity.

## Findings

### Course management and delivery

Section 4.2 tracks the projects' progress at the stages of recruitment and audition for places, discussing the nature of practical and pastoral support offered to students at these preliminary stages, course design and later, approaches to teaching as training unrolled.

### Recruitment and audition

As regards recruitment and audition, Graeae selected twelve for the Missing Piece 4 programme from fifty applicants, one of whom deferred entry due to ill health. Audition criteria were those used by the University for access to its BA Performing Arts degree.

Five students were chosen for Staging Change from twenty-three applicants, whose submissions varied in terms of type and quality. The input of representatives from provider schools facilitated an open minded approach at audition, particularly useful as several applicants were already known to Mind The Gap

Despite wide publication of the CandoCo Foundation Course there were only eight applicants, of whom six were auditioned and two submitted video evidence. Staff highlighted the need to find a balance between the ethos of open access and the demands of vocational training.

Overall, the companies' experience highlighted a need, at recruitment for:

- *Timely and wide distribution of advertising material among groups and individuals, with further consideration of appropriate targeting*

and at audition, for:

- *Alignment of audition criteria with accredited model (where appropriate)*
- *Development of selection criteria*
- *Potential benefits of observation/involvement by partner institution*
- *Consideration of appropriate medium for audition texts*

### Practical and pastoral support

Under Section 4.1.3, interviewees emphasized the need to ensure that students have chosen a medium for assessment which is the best available for them to convey their ideas. At audition, and later during the programme, the services of appropriately skilled support staff provided an essential link with the programme, and as emphasized by CandoCo, it was important that this kind of support as well as equipment should be in place from the beginning of the course.

Recruits to the Staging Change programme needed to take time out from employment, and in a number of cases were to be outside family care for the first time. Visits by Company staff to places of employment and to homes were felt helpful to an understanding of the benefits which could be expected from course participation

Several interviewees from all the projects commented upon balancing support with an unduly 'paternalistic' approach which risks overstepping the boundary into intrusiveness and pointed out that students and carers should take responsibility for alerting tutors to any insufficiencies in support arrangements at access and classroom level. It was noted that disabled tutors may also need support in the classroom.

Student profiles proved useful in prompting visiting tutors to think about how to adapt their teaching approaches to meet students' needs. .

Interviewees emphasized:

- *Extension of the support role outside the classroom*
- *Tutorials as a forum for discussion, feeding into individual learning plans*
- *Planning, sourcing and funding of individually tailored support for students*
- *Liaison role of support workers to support both student and staff needs*
- *The nature and boundaries of a 'paternalistic' approach to student support.*

### **Course design and future course planning**

Section 4.1.4 gives a description of the design and content of the courses offered, and sets out occasions on which integrated learning took place.

For CandoCo students a choreographic project with able bodied dance students at the Conservatoire comprised the final part of the course; two third year students joined all Staging Change students' classes at the residency at Oxford School of Drama; Missing Piece 4 students worked with third year students from London Metropolitan University's Performing Arts degree in delivering workshops to primary schools, as well as auditioning by invitation alongside mainstream students to act in their pieces.

CandoCo staff noted the formation of a core team of tutors around the curriculum as the course progressed, enabling staffing plans to be made for a second year. Following this pilot year, the teaching and learning approach would be streamlined, with more specific goals for tutors and more clearly defined learning outcomes, in line with accreditation procedures.

The lengthening of Missing Piece 4 to 9 months was seen as a major factor in raising the quality and level of student progress from that achieved by Missing Piece 3, while it was pointed out that the fairly short burst of training for Staging Change students could not be compared with the sustained training offered by a full time programme.

A representative for Graeae observed that the requirement to pass specific course modules for successful completion of a programme could work against the inclusion of disabled students, suggesting the need for flexibility among regulators to accommodate disabled students and an advisory body to liaise between validation bodies and schools.

As regards future course planning, uncertainties about continuation funding following the pilot year were for some time a matter of anxiety for the companies, under pressure to prepare for a second year.

*Issues highlighted at policy level:*

- *Need for a secure funding source to underpin development of partnerships*
- *Potential of a more flexible validation structure to foster inclusion*

*Issues highlighted at classroom level:*

- *Need to maximise continuity in course content and tutor/student links*
- *Potential for developing episodes of integration with mainstream students*

## Approaches to Teaching

Section 4.2 discusses the needs of students with a wide range of ability and experience, as well as disability, in accessing the curriculum and implications for tutors in making appropriate adjustments and adaptations.

Many tutors drew simply on their experience in mainstream teaching for insight into the adjustments necessary in the classroom, while others were already used to delivering training to disabled students. Modifications to materials were made alongside adjustments to accommodate learning speeds in ways which took account of both the disability and experience level of students without *'handling with kid gloves'* – a concept to which students were quite sensitive. For their part students, some inexperienced and in a group with other disabled students for the first time, needed to find ways of adjusting to others' different access needs and speeds of learning.

*Highlighted issues:*

- *Range of student experience and ability on each programme*
- *Need for advance knowledge of how students' needs will affect access to the curriculum in terms of material preparation*
- *Need for medical diagnostic approach to students' needs for vocational dance courses*
- *Importance of experience to facilitate adjustment of material as required in class*
- *Making demands on students which are both challenging and realistic*
- *Benefits to tutors who can reassess their approach to mainstream teaching*

## Interaction and partnership with providers

Clearly brokering and developing satisfactory company/provider relationships has been crucial to overall successful outcomes for the projects and Section 4.3 tracks these issues. Some robust relationships were developed over the course of the year, but companies reported initially slow progress in brokering partnerships.

*Factors supporting successful partnership relationships were:*

- *The enthusiasm of a project champion at the provider school*
- *Enthusiasm and commitment from individual tutors*
- *Existing inter-organisational links at tutor level*
- *Effective communications*
- *Time for discussion, adaptation and negotiation*
- *Pre-existing or easily developed inter-organisational synergy*
- *Provision of a learning unit focused outside the company's own training*

*Barriers to building partnerships were:*

- *Tutors' lack of experience in teaching disabled students*
- *Wariness among D&DA schools of compromising standards*

One school suggested that applications for flexible funding should be made jointly on the basis of a pre-existing embryonic relationship between school and company, to encourage a more balanced partnership relationship that involves the mainstream school in a primary, rather than a sub-contractual role.

## Dissemination

Section 4.4 documents the showcasing of students' work from the projects, as well as formal and informal opportunities for sharing information and pooling ideas for bringing more disabled people into higher education and training.

One of the schools confirmed that several teachers coming out of their core role to teach on the programmes for very short periods have returned to share experiences with colleagues.

## Student outcomes and progression

Section 4.5.1 discusses the views of tutors, disabled and mainstream students on their experiences of the integrated training episodes provided by the projects, and ways in which they would (or would not) like to see this moved forward. Sections 4.5.3 and 4.5.4 focus on issues of physical access and a lack of expertise among school staff in training students with disabilities. There was acknowledgment of continuing resistance among mainstream teaching staff to a more integrated training model.

Nevertheless, the majority of tutors overall favoured further episodes of integrated training, in the knowledge that adjustments and amendments in teaching would have to be made which mirror normal professional practice. At the same time, it would have to be accepted that individual students would be unable to do particular things, in which case the teacher would need to find alternatives.

For their part, company representatives overall were of the view that further integration is the next step for students, though there were some cautionary notes, for example the perception that more time is needed in tutoring disabled students, and the heavy demands on stamina and focus that would be made by a sustained, full time course. For the companies, however, the long term goal is that training will be fully integrated into mainstream vocational training structures.

One drama school suggested that joint summer schools with companies like Mind the Gap would complement the work done by some theatre schools, as a more workable model of integration than rehearsing set audition pieces to enable disabled students to apply to drama schools.

Students from all three projects enjoyed the parts of their course that brought them together with mainstream students and would have liked more such opportunities.

Nevertheless, some were unsure whether they would be able to cope with the pace of a fully inclusive course, and whether mainstream students would welcome their presence. Comments from mainstream students indicate that they found the integrated sessions contributed positively to their own learning, and would be pleased to have opportunities to engage with learning disabled or physically disabled students in future, though some felt that the extra time needed to practise performance would prejudice the viability of fully integrated training.

### *Issues highlighted:*

- *'Extreme' level of disability in some cases*
- *Lack of tutor expertise in training disabled students*
- *Remaining resistance to inclusion among staff, as well as practical barriers*
- *Overall, staff and student support for progression towards inclusion at this stage, rather than an 'all or nothing' model.*

## **Evidence for each project's success**

Section 4.6.1 records that all the students from the three projects completed their course successfully.

The number of credits gained reflected the different levels reached by the Missing Piece 4 students; three of the seven who auditioned gained a contract for the touring production, lifting their opportunities for further work. A number of students had applied for further training following Missing Piece 4, and two had been accepted for BBC/Channel 4/actors' Centres Bursary Scheme for Disabled Actors.

For Staging Change students the end of year production of Animal Farm in Bradford was seen by a good number of professionals from the area, and all had definite plans for work as more experienced performers with Mind the Gap or other acting or dance companies following the programme, which offered essentially short and separate periods of intensive training.

Similarly, all the CandoCo students had plans for further work and study on completion of the course which included: further research, a place with a specialist integrated dance/theatre company, study on an HND Community arts course, study on a drama based contemporary dance course, and setting up a company or project. Most of the students came to the Foundation Course with BTEC or BA level qualifications.

Looking ahead, CandoCo staff saw community dance performance and leadership and in adult education as the area of highest potential for progression for the students. Weakness in reading and writing could jeopardise chances of entry to Higher Education dance schools.

A Graeae representative estimated that about half the students would find their future as actors. It was suggested that parts might be found more easily in alternative theatre, where those exploring integrated work tend to be more experimental.

A member of staff at Mind the Gap saw scope for further collaborative work among students arising from newly forged links with other theatre companies. For the future, the company is considering ways of moving the work towards accreditation, based on the Trinity course structure. Advice from mainstream schools would be welcomed. At course level, the company would like to secure slightly longer residencies, and develop more opportunities for integration.

All the student interviewees gave permission for renewed contact to track future progress.

Overall there was agreement that steps towards inclusion will be small and gradual.

## **Legacy from the Projects**

Section 5 explores the projects' legacy in the light of two separate issues central to the inclusive education and training debate: the rights of people with a disability and efficacy.

### *Positive achievements*

- *Establishment of a number of robust partnership relationships between theatre companies and D&DA schools*
- *Contribution to building up a momentum towards integrated training by raising awareness of disability issues in D&DA schools generally*

- *Unique nature of CandoCo's Foundation Course has brought about new levels of understanding of teaching and learning strategies that are dance specific*
- *Increasing number of tutors who now have some experience of teaching students with a disability*
- *Tutors at companies and schools observed different approaches to teaching on which to draw for all their teaching*
- *Potential for experience to be taken back into schools*
- *Provision of quality technique training experiences of a wider range than those previously available to the students*
- *Introduction of episodes of integrated learning which have been enjoyed by both disabled and mainstream students as a basis for further engagement*
- *Evidence of the value of episodes of integration in supporting the learning of disabled students and expanding mainstream students' understanding of their own training*
- *Achievement of accreditation for two of the programmes and for the third, identification of steps towards accreditation*

The programmes have been pilot projects and have demonstrated many examples of good practice in teaching students with a disability, both in discrete groups and in some contexts of integrated learning with mainstream students.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations draw on the evidence presented in previous sections. To begin, we draw attention to:

- *The lack of a clear definition of long term goals for disability projects of which these three are an example*
- *Insecurities regarding the status of ongoing funding*
- *Underdevelopment of support skills among D&DA (and other training institutions) for effective delivery of training for the disabled*
- *The 'conservative tow' linked with a mindset among D&DA schools generally which does not yet engage proactively with the concept of bringing more talented disabled people into training*
- *The imperative for D&DA schools to balance arguments for inclusion with the need to maintain standards*

Overall, evidence from the projects highlights their status as pilot initiatives and the continuing commitment at policy level needed to maintain interest in the disability training generated at school level, and where necessary to promote disability training from the back to the front burner of interest, and activity. At the same time, the majority view of respondents from schools, companies, and not least the students, is that integration should not be hastened in a way which jeopardises the comfort levels of those involved.

- **Recommendation 1: *At policy level, to continue to champion the cause of disability training while working with dance and drama schools in ways which are consistent with their strengths towards clearer definition of the goals for disability projects***

Uncertainties surrounding the future of the projects following their pilot year gave rise to difficulties for the companies in planning ahead both conceptually and in practical terms. It may be that for future projects joint school/company applications for funding are preferred, based on an existing (if nascent) relationship.



- **Recommendation 2: At policy level, support for a secure funding base alongside ongoing monitoring of continuation projects**

As is the case with mainstream students, post course student progression is clearly of concern as a basis for the continued funding of these, and similarly focused projects. Evidence from these projects suggests that for many (though not all) students their criteria for satisfactory progression are that they emerge as more experienced performers who are able to offer more skills in the work contexts that are already familiar to them. Other students may wish to undertake further training.

- **Recommendation 3: That Trinity be asked to develop a foundation qualification for flexible provision that has clear progression into the Trinity Diplomas; and be asked to look at building flexibility and personalised learning routes through the Trinity qualifications for students who progress to a place with the D&DA providers**

Many interviewees have pointed to a lack of experience among D&DA school tutors in teaching disabled students. There was evidence of apprehension concerning unknown difficulties which might await the inexperienced tutor, but this is but one factor underlying the reluctance of schools to engage proactively in bringing more disabled people into training (evidenced by the response of just two schools to companies' offer of INSET). Inexperience and apprehension run alongside and tend to give strength to fears that support for inclusion runs counter to the imperative to maintain standards.

- **Recommendation 4: That consideration be given to a course regulation framework which is sufficiently flexible to accommodate alternative and disability friendly media for presentation of work**

and that the standard of work should be safeguarded by:

- **Recommendation 5: That validating bodies provide a service to schools which can offer case-specific advice on ways in which a programme's training can be made accessible within course regulations.**

## **1. Introduction**

The Dance and Drama Awards (D&DA) were devised to support access to professional training for the most talented individuals and by the end of the first three years of the Awards' introduction, the evaluation team was able to report that within this 'most talented' group, more male students were being accepted for Dance and Musical Theatre training, and more students from low income families were entering training: the Awards had been successful in ending the 'post-code lottery' which through the varying willingness of LEAs to support students operated as a mechanism of selection.

However, disabled students and British minority ethnic (BME) students remained under represented in professional training, despite a proactive approach to addressing the complex issues surrounding their recruitment. The evaluation team therefore recommended that during the second three year phase, a specific objective should be to establish how the Awards are changing access to disabled students and students with special educational needs.

The second Interim Report for Phase II of the evaluation reported that in response to these specific concerns in relation to disabled students, DfES had:

- Sponsored a major national conference on the training needs of performers with disabilities in partnership with RADA
- Contracted ADA inc to draft disability guidelines for providers
- Contracted ADA inc to run on-site disability awareness training for providers
- Contracted PriceWaterhouse Cooper to design a marketing strategy for attracting more applicants for training from disabled and BME populations
- Commissioned a series of partnership training projects with employers of performers with disabilities

Guidance created for providers of the Dance and Drama Awards as a result of this DfES response acknowledged that some individuals in schools accept the inclusion of disabled students within D&DA provision as a natural extension of their provision while others struggle to imagine circumstances in which those with specific impairments and their non-disabled peers could train and ultimately work successfully together<sup>1</sup>. The Guidance therefore highlighted the need for preparing schools in a number of ways, including inspiring and building the confidence of less engaged staff on the one hand and on the other, removing barriers that prevent prospective disabled students from auditioning and entering training. There was a need, in short, for building bridges: linking providers' expertise in dance, drama and stage management with that of those engaged in inclusive working practices.

The following report focuses on three initiatives, supported by DfES, and developed in this mould: Missing Piece 4, provided by Graeae Theatre Company, Staging Change, offered by Mind The Gap, and the CandoCo Foundation Course in Dance. Their timescale covers the period from March 2004 to August 2005. Originally funded for one year only, the existing

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<sup>1</sup>*Guidance on Disability Access* ADA, DfES ISBN No: 1234 5678

projects have now secured Learning Skills Council (LSC) funding for a further year, and a bidding process for future work will subsequently be initiated.

## **2. Description of the projects**

*DfES's formal statement notes that all three projects should match the Department's stated aim of 'delivering bespoke training to suit individuals' needs and requirements, ensuring that students who, due to their disability, cannot study in a mainstream training environment, have an opportunity to work and study with a disability-specific company in an appropriate and suitable environment'.*

Students on all three programmes were eligible to apply for the Dance and Drama Student Support, scaled down in accordance with the length of their course. They were treated on equal terms with other D&DA students, receiving means tested assistance and help with paying for transport and accommodation for the residential elements of the project.

Detailed terms of reference were agreed with DfES for each project, covering background, aims and objectives, marketing and recruitment strategy, timescale for development and delivery, detailed activities, measurement of progress, dissemination and reporting processes. A short description of the focus, aims and objectives for the projects is given in the following sections:

### **2.1 Missing Piece 4**

As a leading professional theatre company of people with physical and/or sensory impairments Graeae is interested in pursuing innovative ideas: *'producing theatre of artistic excellence that is pioneering in both its aesthetic and content'*<sup>2</sup>. Its interests, however, reach beyond that of a producing theatre company to include performance training as well as developing new writing, young people's theatre and education work.

The Missing Piece 4 Course Prospectus explains that Graeae set up the Missing Piece in response to the severe lack of training and career opportunities available in professional theatre for those with sensory or physical impairments. Missing Piece 1 and 2, four month training courses hosted respectively by Sadlers Wells and Manchester Metropolitan University, highlighted the need for Graeae to link up with a training organisation to continue Missing Piece, and Missing Piece 3 and 4 were both run in partnership with London Metropolitan University. The partnership arose through existing working links between individuals at the two institutions, and the centrality of access and diversity issues in the University's policy.

Missing Piece 4, accredited by London Metropolitan University, ran over four days a week from September 2004 to May 2005, following a two semester structure, each of 15 weeks.

Following an induction week, Semester A provided a basic practical skills foundation (in voice, acting and movement), with seminars held in parallel. An Exploring Text module used a variety of texts to consider approaches to acting skills, then looked at disciplines used in non-text based work. A performance event took place at the end of the semester, based on both the text and non-text based extracts studied.

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<sup>2</sup> Graeae Missing Piece 4 Course Prospectus 2004-2005

*Consolidating the learning of Semester A, Semester B introduced solo performances and a showcase enabled students to work on monologues and group text work. Workshops led by various practitioners were arranged to provide workshop theory and skills delivery training to the students. The final part of the course consisted of a showcase and professional development week, with industry based seminars and audition classes led by leading theatre professionals.*

Graeae staff indicated that for students a desired progression route would be admission to a D&DA provider for further training, or admission to an HE institution for a degree programme, or for some, entry into professional work.

At the outset Missing Piece 4 hoped to forge links with ALRA (The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts), Oxford School of Drama and Arts. Ed. London; at a professional level, the project aimed to provide the opportunity for tutors from Graeae and from the three schools to work collaboratively, sharing good practice in the delivery of inclusive training in the performing arts.

As students of London Metropolitan University, Missing Piece 4 students enjoyed all the institution's services and their progress was monitored through the assessment methods in effect through the university's quality assurance protocol. Progress was also monitored through regular tutorials, and individual learning programmes were worked out for the 11 students.

## **2.2 Staging Change**

Mind the Gap is a professional theatre company based in Bradford and working with learning disabled actors, whose stated mission is to *'dismantle barriers to artistic excellence so that learning disabled and non-disabled artists can perform alongside one another as equals'*<sup>3</sup>. The Company tours nationally each year and runs Open College accredited training courses covering all aspects of theatre.

The 'Staging Change' project aimed to form links with D&DA providers, beginning at the stage of audition and recruitment, developing and delivering with them a programme that would enable the artists to access further training opportunities with mainstream specialist training organisations.

This was a pilot programme designed as a 10 month part-time course for 5 students over 19 years of age. The Company recruited students on a nation wide basis from aspiring actors with already significant prior experience, either in the form of training received, or in the form of professional performance experience gained through working for an Arts organisation.

*The project focused upon acting for the stage, radio, film and television and included voice work, audition skills, physical theatre, character work, stagecraft, stage fighting, improvisation skills and forum theatre. The course brochure explained that Staging Change would be made up of three parts: "residencies", where all the students work together; performance placement, involving working with other learning disabled actors on a show; and thirdly, individual and small group work with the drama schools and Mind the Gap.*

*Tuition was free to students, and there was no charge for training costs, travel, accommodation in Bradford and near the drama schools, the services of support or communication workers, travel, or the costs incurred for attending auditions.*

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<sup>3</sup> Staging Change 2004-2005 brochure, Arts Council England

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### **2.3 CandoCo**

An Associate Director explained that as a leading educator of disabled dancers, CandoCo had noticed a significant gap in the provision of training: as an employer too, the CandoCo had for some time found difficulty in recruiting new dancers for its performer company: *'we just can't find well trained, highly trained disabled dancers'*.

While in the past the Company had worked through its education and outreach programme to offer workshops and training to potential new dancers, most of its funding had come from the Arts Council, for the purpose of making and touring dance productions and for financing one-off workshops and short residencies. This is the first time CandoCo has had the opportunity to run an extended training programme.

The Company offered a one year, full time Foundation Course with three terms of eleven weeks, sixteen hours per week; its brief was to deliver a foundation course enabling students to enter a Trinity accredited course. The course leaflet explained that the programme would: *'encourage and support students to identify their individual strengths and prepare them for more advanced training'*. Accreditation was planned through the London Open College Network (LOCN).

The Foundation Course focused upon understanding basic movement principles, applying these to develop the movement vocabulary of individual students and supporting students in implementing them in their work. With an emphasis upon inclusion in a wider sense, the project aimed to forge links with D&DA (and HE) providers, to enable the disabled students to work alongside the non-disabled students enrolled at the partner schools.

Based at the ASPIRE Centre, the national centre for spinal injury in Stanmore, with access to pool, fitness and IT equipment, the course included: choreographic residencies with CandoCo Dance Company and other guest artists. The course was offered free of charge.

As regards fitness, health and safe practice, the course provided for students to work to an individual physical development programme, devised in consultation with a dance science specialist and an osteopath. They also had access to body conditioning, movement therapy and rehabilitation specialists e.g. Alexander, Pilates and physiotherapy. Access to further learning support was also provided where required.

12 places were available, and 5 students were recruited.

CandoCo recognised a need to develop strong partnership relationships in order to secure the long term future of the foundation course.

All three projects submitted an end of programme report to the LSC.

### **2.4 Areas of Investigation**

The aim of the evaluation was to investigate the effectiveness of the three projects, and it was decided that this would focus on the following:

- Course management and delivery in the areas of
  - Recruitment
  - Audition
  - Practical and pastoral student support
  - Course design
  - Approaches to teaching

- Interaction and partnerships with providers
- Dissemination of teaching and learning practices
- Student outcomes and progression
- Legacy from the projects/Conclusions
- Recommendations

### 3. Methodology

Prior to the commencement of programmes a visit was made to each of the three progress meetings held with DfES. At these meetings financial arrangements were discussed as well as plans for recruitment, audition and the rolling out of programmes. Members of staff representing the companies agreed to co-operate with the evaluation, allowing visits to observe elements of the course by arrangement, and the team secured the agreement of schools to visits as their participation in course delivery became clear.

Visits to all the projects to observe the teaching and learning process were made to include the range of experiences offered to the students. The visits gave the opportunity for discussion of aims and objectives with appropriate members of staff at the companies, with school tutors engaged in delivery of the course material and with the students, all of whom agreed to give their views. Where face to face interviews could not be accommodated because of pressures of time, visits were followed up by telephone interviews as appropriate.

Important topics for discussion with host project staff and teachers from the provider schools included plans for follow up, anticipated legacy from their project, and the implications for DADA in terms of ongoing access for students with disabilities.

First and second year students were observed in training at Arts Ed., London as a background to the evaluation, and overall 21 visits were made to early progress meetings, to observe the training in progress, to workshops, rehearsals and performances.

A breakdown of the interviews undertaken is as follows:

- *14 Face to face or telephone interviews with host project staff about their aims and objectives*
- *17 Face to face or telephone discussions with tutors from the provider schools on their responses to involvement with each project*
- *individual or group, face to face or telephone interviews with project students about their reasons for taking the course, what they feel they are learning and how they hope this may help them find employment*
- *individual or group, face to face or telephone interviews with mainstream students about reasons for their involvement and their perceptions of engagement with the project students*

The anonymity of individual contributions to this evaluation has been preserved as promised at the time of interview. For the sake of clarity, pseudonyms have been used for the students.

It should be noted that in discussing, analysing and reporting findings, there are difficult dilemmas to resolve in the use of disability-specific terminology. Students and tutors, rightly, do not expect to be defined by their disabilities., which foregrounds the condition rather than the person. However, the research team found it difficult to adhere to the principles of the social model of disability. To report the findings without very clear references to individual disabilities would be to lose the opportunity to learn from the projects. The nature and extent

of the students' disabilities, the ways in which tutors analysed student needs, the search for creative solutions to facilitate each individual's access to learning and the support mechanisms that were put in place are all of key interest and importance to the readers of this report. Therefore individual disabilities are referred to specifically and medical labels are used on occasion but hopefully not gratuitously.

#### **4. Findings**

##### **4.1 Course management and delivery**

###### **4.1.1 Recruitment**

A member of staff at Graeae reported that Missing Piece 4 had been advertised widely, and a recruitment flyer was sent out to disability Arts organisations in the UK, to names on a Graeae database, on the DfES and Graeae websites, to social service departments, and to venues visited by Graeae while on tour. For the future, Graeae was building up a list of special schools in the UK so that teachers there can be advised of programmes. While links developed with London Metropolitan University have so far been geared to accreditation, there were plans to explore the possibility of forging marketing links. Twelve students from fifty applicants were recruited to the programme, but one student deferred entry due to ill health. It was later decided to use this successful strategy for recruitment for Missing Piece 5. Taster weekend workshops held over four weekends from December to April, as part of recruitment phase, allowed Graeae and participants to sample content and teaching offered on Missing Piece. This enabled those unsuccessful at audition to continue short-course training over the next year and build up some experience.

Mind the Gap sent out the Staging Change brochure and recruitment leaflet to targeted places where it was known that a potential pool of individuals with some prior experience of theatre arts had worked or trained. From the twenty-three replies, twelve were invited to audition, and five were selected for the programme. A member of staff observed that although applicants had sent in the requested material, the selection process was not altogether smooth, as the type and quality of submissions was very varied. The company planned at this stage to make information about the course available much earlier next year, in the hope that this would attract more applicants than the twenty-three who responded this time. By the time of writing this report, six students for the project's second year had been recruited from two days of audition in Yorkshire and one day in London, hosted by Arts Ed. This split venue audition had allowed a greater number of applicants to attend, and reduced the resource burden in bringing applicants from the south to a far distant audition.

CandoCo's strategy for recruitment involved sending details of the course to its database contacts, which included agencies such as the National Dance Agencies. In addition DfES forwarded CandoCo's flier to about 12,000 contacts through Connexions. Bearing in mind its wide publication, and the course's capacity for twelve students, the low number of eight responses was disappointing. There was no addition to this number, despite an extended closing date for applications and a new, more focused and proactive approach with targeted individuals.

It was suggested that a longer time frame might be appropriate in future to allow reflection on the practicalities of attending the programme; it was thought possible, too, that a longer time frame could facilitate circulation of course information by word of mouth, as potential students may not use traditional pathways for finding out about education and training opportunities. Only one of the applicants had worked previously with CandoCo, and it was thought likely that others might decide not to apply because they felt (erroneously) that they would already have covered the subject content of the programme.

*Issues highlighted:*

- *Timely distribution of material to encourage recruitment*
- *Wide distribution of material among targeted groups/individuals*
- *Further consideration of appropriate possible target groups/individuals*

#### **4.1.2 Audition**

Thirty-two applicants for Missing Piece 4 were auditioned over two days. The criteria used at audition were those used for the BA Performing Arts degree and the London Metropolitan University audition process. Applicants were asked to choose a two minute monologue from a text, supplied in various formats as appropriate to the students: audio format, large and standard print, but not in British Sign Language (BSL) or video. For BSL users Graeae supplied a synopsis, script, the flexibility to improvise around a character which was also described in plain English (specifically structured around BSL syntax). The applicants engaged in improvisation, warm up exercises in the morning, and then presented their monologues to the audition panel, in a group. In the afternoon they took part in a twenty minute interview, during which they were asked to comment on an unseen text.

A member of staff at Mind the Gap reported that the four mainstream schools invited to observe the company's audition process had found this useful in considering ways in which the project's students could be integrated into a new learning experience. Interestingly, a disability training specialist observed that as soon as the candidates were introduced to the audition panel, *'the process became about them and how to help them'* rather than about teachers dwelling on the difficulties of working with the students. Representatives from the four schools were invited as observers, but in practice took an active part on the final day of the audition process. Each was invited to make an individual assessment of the applicants to assess transferable skills, including communication.

Mind the Gap conceded that their final selection was influenced by the schools' input: in several cases the final selection changed. The company emphasized, however, that criteria for admission to the course had not been subverted, it was simply that input from the schools had enabled the company to look at applicants afresh. This was particularly pertinent as some of the candidates were already known to the company. A member of staff at Mind the Gap commented later in the programme upon the *'well crafted, physically assured, well performed'* pieces presented by those successful at audition. Observation of the Staging Change students' work during the course of the programme enabled the company to have some insight into the work that went into making it possible for them to produce such a polished performance at audition, and most importantly, to begin to see ways in which it might be possible to support that process more effectively.

For practical reasons the company decided next year to audition on one day only (an applicant for the first year of the project had travelled to Bradford from London for the days of the audition).

Six of the eight applicants received by CandoCo were auditioned, and the remaining two sent in video evidence instead. The audition comprised participation in a creative workshop led by a disabled dancer from the Company, presentation of a pre-prepared solo and an interview. The audition panel comprised Company members and education staff and some tensions had emerged about selection. It became apparent that Company ethos of open access to their education and outreach activity needed to be balanced with a better understanding of the demands of vocational training and that more thought needed to be



given to selection criteria. For next year a taster day was to be arranged ahead of audition, enabling applicants to gain some insight into whether they wish to apply.

As the selection process was beginning for 2005/2006 course, staff were keenly aware of the need to ensure that at the next audition the company would emphasize and seek out potential for vocational development.

*Issues highlighted:*

- *Alignment of audition process with accredited model*
- *Choice of medium for audition texts*
- *Observation/Involvement by partner institution*
- *Development of selection criteria*
- *Tensions between open access priorities and demands of vocational training*

#### **4.1.3 Practical and pastoral support**

Tutorial support was offered to Graeae students in rotation, for half an hour every two weeks to discuss students' preferred learning methods, their progress in particular classes and strategies for progress, all to feed into the students' individual learning plans. One tutor acknowledged that submission of work through an alternative medium is a contentious issue, because of the imperative to preserve standards: there is a view that the essay, as a very important way of organising thoughts, is an important skill to master. Others accept that ideas can be conveyed equally effectively through an alternative medium, though not just in any form chosen by the student. Graeae recorded its emphasis on ensuring that students have understood assessment tasks and that their chosen medium for assessment: whether, for example, via video, audio essay, signed essay on video, or written work, is appropriate for them and the best way for them to convey their ideas. For visually impaired students, core texts were recorded onto audio tape, and were also offered with enlarged print. Students worked in English while in class, but a BSL translation of the texts was available for them to work on at home.

One student on Missing Piece 4, with a significant speech articulation difficulty, had applied for the previous programme but had been unsuccessful. Graeae reported that it was felt, at the time that the applicant needed to gain further training experience, but the process also highlighted for Graeae the need for a different level of access support. Over the year, Graeae's access team and artistic director worked together to explore a number of creative possibilities which looked at the provision of communication support for a student with such speech characteristics. On successful re-application for Missing Piece 4, these possibilities were then discussed with the student, who also brought forward the difficulty he had been having in securing dependable PA support and the problems in using agency staff who had no understanding of creative or theatrical practices. The most effective solution was to secure core hour access support that was both consistent and appropriate, and so the post of a Creative Enabler was developed.

Graeae also reported that the role of the Creative Enabler was to facilitate and focus on the very specific access needs of this student, a primary function being to aid and develop communication strategies between the student, fellow students and tutors, and which also included some facilitation in performance settings. During the course it was possible for the student and the enabler to explore a range of possibilities in access and communication with an audience and this process enforced the importance of the theatrical experience and knowledge base of the Creative Enabler.

Access support workers were present in Missing Piece sessions. They were employed by Graeae following access discussions with the students, to work during course hours, enabling all the students' access to the learning and teaching on the project. Mostly they provided audio description, line feeding, orientation, note-taking and mobility support.

CandoCo core staff commented upon feeling unprepared and under-resourced in some areas of pastoral and practical support for students. It had taken more time than they had estimated to get the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) in place and some students did not receive the learning aids they needed until the second term.

The company emphasized the importance of having support in place for students from the beginning of the course, reporting that a deaf student had progressed very quickly once support measures became available, but this did not happen until sometime during the spring term.

For a blind student the course had proved a mainstay of her professional development, as she had access for the first time to a computer which would enable her to read material for her research. This year pastoral support and student accommodation have proved difficult, however, for CandoCo's staff levels have meant that the course co-ordinator has also had to take on the role of counsellor. CandoCo staff are aware that one member of staff as director and as counsellor is un-workable, but have not been in a position to address the issue, given the unchanged level of the company's budget.

While the location of CandoCo's course at the ASPIRE Centre offered much in the way of physical resources and staff expertise, its location in Stanmore brought problems for the students who commented upon their difficult and expensive daily journeys, often by taxi, and their sense of isolation from the dance world of central London. Senior staff were seeking a new base for the course, but changes were unlikely before 2006.

Tutors for all the projects emphasized that students need to take responsibility for alerting tutors when support arrangements are not working for them. Several tutors pointed out that all the disabled students participating in the three projects are adults, and questioned whether it is appropriate to adopt an approach which might be considered more 'paternalistic' than would be standard for mainstream students. It could be occasionally difficult to find the appropriate balance between acting in the best interests of a student's welfare (in the case, for example, of an anorexic student) and overstepping the boundary into intrusiveness.

Tutors emphasized that the students and support workers needed to be forthright in advising any need for practical changes to improve access, (in the case of Graeae students the university's Disability Department was available for this purpose), and in advising staff of any difficulties at classroom level. For example, one tutor recalled that she had repeatedly, and unknowingly, stepped forward during a class, obscuring the communication between a deaf student and his signer. In a similar vein a blind tutor explained that her own disability made her particularly dependent upon the students to inform her if they were having difficulties with any exercise. This tutor appreciated having a support worker in the room, and would ask '*how's it going?*'. She was also careful to inform the support worker ahead of time of the kinds of things they should watch out for, and inform her in the event of a problem. Graeae tried to facilitate liaison between the access support and the teacher at the lesson planning stage, so that support worker would come into class having been asked by the tutor to look out for specific things.

As Staging Change was a part time course, students needed from time to time to negotiate time off from their employer to attend residencies. Moreover, the dates set out on the application form remained provisional at the time of audition: agreement had still to be reached with provider schools. Staff at Mind the Gap therefore visited students' places of

employment with a view to establishing a relationship with employers, showing them what the programme would entail and the benefits likely to accrue to justify repeated and prolonged absences from work.

Staff also visited the students' homes prior to the start of the programme, as has also been the practice with students on a full time course at Mind the Gap. The purpose of the visits was to gain families' support, both during and between residencies. Staff had found, too, that they were able to gain knowledge and understanding of the students' needs by seeing them in their home environment. The first of the residencies outside Bradford was for four of the five students the first time that they had lived outside the home environment.

Two of the students had worked together sporadically before, though not on a full time basis, and Mind the Gap staff emphasized that *'there was still quite a lot of group bonding to do for them to learn about each other'*. During the residencies away from Bradford group accommodation was found for all the students, sometimes on a self-catering basis, and always accompanied by Mind the Gap staff. Staff felt it essential that they received support in the evenings, after an action packed day of much longer duration than their usual working day of 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., perhaps three or four days a week.

During the classes, a member of Mind the Gap's staff was always present to support the students. As there were only five students in class, the support worker quite frequently joined in the exercises, particularly where work with a partner, or an even number of students, was required. On one occasion observed, a student who was having difficulty in mastering a dance routine was taken outside the class for a short time to practise under the guidance of the support worker.

At CandoCo the student profiles were prepared for all visiting tutors. They gave an outline of 'capabilities and limitations', 'areas of attention' and 'additional learning support' for each student and were devised in the first two weeks of the course after assessment by an osteopath, by CandoCo staff and through an individual tutorial. The profiles were intended, as with information provided to tutors for the other two projects, to prompt visiting tutors to think about how to adapt their teaching approaches to meet student needs

It is important to note that tutors who are disabled may also need support. Graeae indicated that for tutors who have worked for the company previously, access support will be provided where possible, enabling the tutor to plan a lesson with the support worker who then attends the class. A blind tutor working for the first time with Missing Piece admitted that it was not easy for her to gauge the reaction of students to her teaching, adding that she had insecurities about not being able to monitor visually who the students were, who had left or re-entered the room, their facial expressions, whether they were bored or yawning. It would have been helpful, she suggested, to have present an access worker familiar with the group to support her and give feedback on these issues.

#### *Issues highlighted:*

- *Extension of support role outside the classroom*
- *Tutorials as a forum for discussion, feeding into individual learning plans*
- *Planning, sourcing and funding of individually tailored support for students*
- *Liaison role of support workers to support both student and staff needs*
- *Nature and boundaries of a 'paternalistic' approach to student support*

#### 4.1.4 Course design

Accreditation for CandoCo's programme was secured through the LOCN as the course proceeded, with permission to award the first cohort of students retrospectively.

The programme was arranged in five units, according to LOCN structures:

- Dance/movement studies
- Movement analysis
- Contextual studies
- Fitness, health and safety
- Performance studies

However, the delivery of the units was integrated so that the diverse learning needs could be met more effectively. A member of staff indicated that this flexibility within the learning units was planned at the outset. The regular timetable was supplemented with choreographic residencies by CandoCo Dance Company and other guest artists. A choreographic project with able bodied dance students at the Conservatoire formed the final part of the course.

Students worked every day from 10.30 to 5.30. Mornings were given over to practical dance study, giving the basis of contemporary dance, ballet technique and improvisation techniques. Most afternoons were spent on performance/choreography projects, including work on solo pieces. Theoretical units such as anatomy, context studies and movement analysis had a large practical component to their delivery to enable students to learn more easily. One afternoon was set aside for fitness, health and safety, on the basis of which an individual plan was devised for each student, including negotiated learning and development goals. Students maintained individual log books documenting progress towards their goals and targets, discussed in termly individual and weekly group tutorials. Students also undertook peer assessment of performance and work in the studio.

Staff at CandoCo noted that as the pilot course progressed, a core team of tutors was being formed around the curriculum: the programme was becoming established. At the same time, this enabled plans to be made for a second year: tutors to be invited back, additional tutors to be brought in. A streamlining of the teaching and learning approach would involve more specific goals for tutors and a clearer articulation of learning outcomes, in line with accreditation procedures.

Staging Change students were asked to complete tutor logs daily, recording the content of sessions and what had been learnt from them. The logs were used to link work done with provider school tutors with that done in Bradford, and to serve as a memory aid because of the fairly long gaps between residencies. Apart from the lapse of time between residencies, participation in other activities could also tend to blur the memory of lessons from the programme. It was not possible to ask the Staging Change students to give up outside work during the programme, as a full time learning opportunity was not being offered through the project.

The course included:

- Voice work
- Verse
- Audition skills
- Physical theatre
- Character work
- Mask work

- Stagecraft
- Stage fighting
- Improvisation skills
- Forum theatre
- Television work
- Radio work

Core texts for the Staging Change Programme were 'Animal Farm' and 'Taming of the Shrew'. These plays were chosen bearing in mind the need for auditioning actors to offer a piece by a modern and a classical author, giving the five students plenty of material to develop for this purpose.

For their part, Staging Change students found it most helpful in every training context where tutors had a clear lesson structure which was made explicit to them in advance. Students' comments support the view that they enjoyed and gained from sessions with all the provider schools. However, the presence of a particular tutor during both the first residency at Bradford and the second residency '*on his turf*' at Arts Ed, as expressed by one of the students, was a constant factor which helped to build their confidence for what was, for some, the first time away from home. A member of staff from Mind the Gap observed, too, that in having more sustained contact with them, there was a progression of this tutor's understanding of the students, which in turn enabled them to gain more benefit from his session. There was a similar continuity too in the sessions presented by a single tutor from Oxford School of Drama, Guildford School of Acting and Mountview. Mind the Gap staff observed that where one tutor focused on a single topic throughout several days contact time with the students, learning outcomes were particularly well defined and students were able to consolidate their learning more easily.

A member of staff at Mind the Gap indicated that certain learning needs in individual Staging Change students (and among learning disabled students more generally) need to be supported in particular ways. In terms of approach to teaching this might mean more repetition, perhaps putting more steps in a process, chunking the work up in slightly smaller steps. It might also mean frequent use of reflective techniques: engagement in activity and reflection immediately afterwards, to eliminate long gaps between doing and reflecting. In addition, clear explanations to students are helpful, amounting to an ongoing narrative during a session which explains what the teacher is asking students to do.

Bearing in mind the above points, Mind the Gap referred to the potential benefits that longer tutor/student contact time could bring, pointing out that the experience gained on the Staging Change course, with fairly short bursts of input from tutors cannot be compared with that on offer from a more sustained training programme. Many of the lessons to be learnt within performance training are not a question of understanding new knowledge, but a question of daily repetition towards an accumulative effect. [such lessons] *have over time an effect on your voice, or on your body or on your ability to perform...* (member of staff, Mind the Gap). In a similar vein, a tutor from Arts Ed. likened the brain to a muscle, telling students that the often repeated process of line learning strengthened the muscle, making the process easier and quicker.

During the residency at Oxford School of Drama, all classes were joined by two third year students from the School, chosen '*in a sense because we knew that they were good students and would be very welcoming*' (member of staff, Oxford School of Drama). The mainstream students joined in the exercises, helping individual students when, for example they had misinterpreted a tutor's instructions, or needed focused attention to help them to carry out what they were asked to do. The presence of the more experienced students allowed the tutor to give every student some individual attention, leaving one Staging

Change student to practise with the support of a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student, and moving on to the next. One tutor felt that the ratio of 2 mainstream to five Staging Change students was about right, enabling the focus to remain on the latter group of students for one to one teaching, or teaching with the support of the mainstream student.

Aspects of the Missing Piece 3 course were changed significantly for its successor, being either dropped or rewritten for Missing Piece 4; in addition, more staff from the Performing Arts degree were to be involved in the later programme, and there were moves towards incorporating Missing Piece within the Performing Arts Department of the university. A major change, however, was the move to a 9 month long course, and at its close staff were able to report that this increase in its length had proved more successful in terms of raising the quality and level of student progress.

The Missing Piece 4 course included:

- Preparation of CV's/Photos
- Voice
- Movement
- Acting
- Non-Naturalism
- Solo Performance
- Preparation and rehearsals for Showcase
- Radio work
- TV work
- Workshops

The Missing Piece 4 students worked with the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students from the University's Performing Arts degree, delivering practical, drama-based workshops to two primary schools at the end of their 'Workshop Theory and Skills Delivery' module.

In a second piece of work which involved inclusion with the third year Performing Arts students, several Missing Piece students were invited by students taking the Directing module to act in their pieces, having auditioned alongside the mainstream students for a part.

One tutor for Graeae reported a positive change in emphasis towards a more concentrated focus on topics, so that students worked, for example, on duologues for a sizeable block, rather than a rather fragmented period of three hours at a time. He emphasized the need to ensure that the course is practice based, suggesting that the high number of different modules was helpful to students in focusing on becoming actors. He perceived a problem in persuading his Missing Piece 4 pupils to prepare adequately for his sessions, and felt that an underlying cause could be his short and infrequent contact time with the students, and contextual reading which he felt was still a little too theory based.

A teacher for Graeae commented that at most drama schools the way courses are set up would work against the inclusion of disabled students, and his comment would apply equally to the Staging Change students. The requirement to pass a particular module for successful completion of the whole course would disqualify a student unable to complete the dance module of a drama course, for example.

The above teacher suggested that this situation could be avoided only if the bodies that regulate courses are aware of these particular problems and can be flexible about accommodating disabled students. It would be necessary for the validating bodies to be able to provide advice to schools, rather than each school being in the position of having

independently to make special adjustments to accommodate different individuals: the schools should be able to approach validating bodies and say: *'we have this student with short arms coming onto this course. How does it work with the different modules? We are being validated by this particular university, what are your suggestions for how we go about this?'* (Graeae teacher) and the validating bodies should be able to give informative answers to these questions.

A body of experts in the field to liaise between the validation bodies and the schools would support this vision of a more flexible validation process.

#### **4.1.5 Future course planning**

As regards future course planning, uncertainties about continuation funding after the pilot year were for some time a matter of anxiety for the companies, as preparations for a second year course (for example auditions and taster workshops) needed to be put in place in advance of a positive decision. A member of staff at CandoCo, mindful of the staff resource problems during the pilot year commented: *'I don't know when we're going to get to sit down with anyone and say 'that budget didn't work for these reasons, and this is what we really need to run the course properly', or whether I won't actually get the chance to do that now'* (member of CandoCo staff).

Candoco admitted having *'completely underestimated the amount of resources that would have to be put into planning; also the accreditation, that is quite a big cost, mainly because we can't do it in-house, because we don't have the time, or actually the expertise.....so paying someone on a freelance basis [is an expensive way of doing it]'*. Senior staff and the CandoCo Board have reaffirmed their commitment to the course and restructured staffing so that there will be four part-time members of staff, instead of one full-time and numerous casual staff. This will enable responsibilities to be devolved to a director, two curriculum leaders and an administrative/access officer.

#### *Issues highlighted:*

- *At policy level, need for a secure funding source to underpin the development of partner relationships*
- *At policy level, potential of a more flexible validation structure for fostering inclusion*
- *At classroom level, need to maximise continuity in course content and tutor/student links*
- *At classroom level, potential for development of limited episodes of integration with mainstream students*

#### **4.2 Approaches to Teaching**

*'No written guide can teach a reader how to teach disabled people. To do such a thing would imply that there is but one way.... Disabled people, like everyone else, are unique and the adaptations and reversioning required for one person is simply not translatable to all others, even those with similar impairments'*<sup>4</sup>.

Approaches to teaching on all three programmes, and the comments of interviewees reflect the validity of this statement, and it was pointed out that in any case literature on approaches to teaching, particularly in the area of teaching those whose speech and vocal ability are impaired, is sparse.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Guidance on Disability Access', ADA, DfES ISBN No: 1234 5678

The phrase 'adaptations and reversioning' suggests the need for up-front knowledge as a basis for preparation, and interviewees favoured advance knowledge of students' learning needs, as distinct from knowledge of a diagnosis in medical terms. A teacher on the Missing Piece 4 programme expressed this as follows: *'I knew about who needed something read for them and who needed any support writing things down. I didn't know what their impairments were, but I knew what their access needs were'* (tutor). Knowledge about access needs was, she said, essential: it would not be feasible simply to prepare printed information in advance of the course and assume that every student would be able to read it, but knowledge of disabilities would not make any difference to the preparation. In a more general sense, staff for Mind the Gap and for Graeae observed that the issue is not so much one of addressing the individual needs of disabled students as considering the question: *'how do you teach inclusively?'*. Based on this premise, tutors needed to know how students' various disabilities would affect access to the curriculum.

CandoCo staff, on the other hand, adopted a more 'medical' diagnostic approach as noted in section 4.1.3. They used specialist medical assessment as a basis for students' individual learning plans, sharing the information with all tutors to enable them to devise teaching and learning strategies centred around each student's specific capabilities, development potential and safety

It should be noted that this strategy is not very different from the approach of all vocational dance courses which include medical diagnosis of body structure, range of movement, strength and flexibility as part of the selection process and later identification of specific individual learning goals in terms of strength building, increasing flexibility, modifying alignment or changing habitual movement patterns: the factor setting it apart from mainstream practice is the extent to which CandoCo adapted teaching approaches to facilitate students' access to training.

The range of Candoco students' capabilities and needs became particularly apparent during the second term, with the need for some adjustment from staff to address this. As expressed by a member of staff: *'I have really readjusted the approach, the teaching processes for each person now because they are at such different levels and you cannot work with a common denominator'* (member of CandoCo staff). Here, individual differentiation is key to students learning. This is most evident in the teaching of techniques and especially contemporary technique, where the approach was tutor-led improvisation, starting with simple gestural movement and progressing into more complex travelling movement, rather than the traditional class format of directly taught centre exercises, movement phrases, jumps and travelling sequences. This enabled students continually to devise movement appropriate to their physical capabilities, the tutor constantly urging bolder, more complex or more extreme movement. Tutors were observed using a wide range of teaching strategies including detailed audio-description to physical demonstration, or hands-on guidance with dance-technical/anatomical information as to, for example, placement, where a movement is instigated, stable centre, positions and directions in space. This contributed to the articulation of individual requirements by the students (often overtly in relation to their disability, impairment or condition) in order to create an optimum learning environment in class and choreographic sessions.

The development of an Individual Training Plan (ITP) works in tandem with this approach. In this plan students identify and formulate their particular needs and requirements. Similarly, students are encouraged to describe (with explanation and demonstration) specific adaptations suited to their bodies (for example what constitutes a jump, a turn, or a certain arm position). These elements are of particular relevance to dance technical training and to more structural techniques, e.g. Alexander, Pilates and Anatomical alignment.



One blind tutor for Graeae described having worked for two weeks with the speech impaired student mentioned above who was enabled to enrol on Missing Piece 4 through newly funded access support and with two similarly disabled graduates from Missing Piece 3. Together they talked about exploring text and speech artistically and creative ways of making their work more accessible to an audience. The three actors suggested using a video projector and screen and playing with the words being projected onto the screen as they were spoken. The tutor described this as a very rare, challenging and rewarding experience, calling for learner and teacher to rely on each other to find a solution, in the absence of any textbook guidance on the subject.

Staff at Graeae indicated that all tutors had been required, and were paid, to attend four induction meetings, totalling twelve hours. The first was a three hour session on Disability and Equality Training, focusing in a very broad sense on language and practice, the second was Deaf Awareness Training, led by Graeae's Artistic Director, which focused on working with deaf students and sign language interpreters. The focus of the third session was Working with Visually Impaired Students, led by a tutor from Missing Piece 1 who has also acted in Graeae productions, and the final session was a course led by a tutor from London Metropolitan University on Course Content and Assessment. However, a member of staff at Graeae emphasized that the most important quality in tutors for Missing Piece is openness, an absence of fear of working with people with disabilities: *'it's about whether as a practitioner you're interested in pushing those boundaries and what an actor is, and what a performer is...'* (member of staff, Graeae).

A tutor for Staging Change gave an example of this openness, reporting that had he been aware in advance that one of the students would be unable to climb on a chair, he may well have prejudged her abilities and jettisoned his plans to do a particular exercise; in the event, the exercise worked very well, and the student found her own way of dealing with its physical requirements.

A number of tutors for Missing Piece 4 and for Staging Change expressed slight impatience with pre-lesson planning (although making appropriate preparations in terms of providing accessible learning materials). In the words of one tutor: *'In a sense I am not in favour of too much planning for the teaching – I just want to get on and do it'*. (tutor for Staging Change). There were many instances where tutors were able to call upon their considerable experience as teachers, whether this involved students with a learning or physical disability, to deal spontaneously with individual students' access difficulties as they arose in class. For example, one tutor had found the need to make her language more explicit in making her intentions known to the Missing Piece students. Rather than saying: *"everyone close your eyes"*, a more appropriate phrase might be: *'I'd like everyone to focus in and cut out all the stimulus around them'*. This tutor had realised that the latter phrase would convey her exact meaning more effectively to all students, who might otherwise be listening to the sounds around them, albeit with closed eyes.

One tutor suggested that disabled people rarely have either at a school or a social level, the casual contact with drama enjoyed by others, where they can join the after school club or join a Sunday club. He suggested further that the fact that disabled people may lack this kind of casual experience means that Missing Piece is often starting at quite a low level. Other Graeae staff pointed out that much mainstream theatre presentation is inaccessible for many disabled people due to lack of physical access, BSL interpretation or audio description. Another tutor agreed with this, framing her comments in terms of students' varying accumulation of 'cultural capital' in their lives prior to the Missing Piece 4 training, including exposure to mainstream theatre and theatre in its wider form: *there was a wide range of experience among students on the course and 'one end of the range is doing some quite amazing work and the other end of the range is doing OK, you know'*.(freelance tutor for Graeae).

Another tutor for Graeae also found wide variations in the group in terms of their experience, finding that *'some are way ahead and some are still struggling to understand what it is they're being asked to do'*. This could partly be explained, he suggested, by the reliance of some students upon translation into sign language, in which concepts may be interpreted differently from those expressed in English. A second issue, however, concerned the amount of preparation work done outside class – it was only now, after much reminding that some students were beginning to understand the need to apply themselves to this. This was true, too, at times with some Staging Change students and can be an element of the learning curve also for mainstream, particularly inexperienced, students. Bearing in mind the limited contact time with students (particularly true for Staging Change), it was important for students to take on the responsibility of identifying things from the class which they could practise at home, otherwise there was the risk that input during class time would exceed their capacity to learn.

The range of experience, and ability, was evident as three Missing Piece 4 students rehearsing a scene from a set play were given advice and suggestions regarding their engagement with the audience and with their fellow actors. After several re-runs the tutor told the three performers: *'You are behaving much more naturally with each other – that is much improved'* (and this was indeed true, in the opinion of this observer).

Two observing students highlighted the above scene during a subsequent lunchtime interview. They described the performance as *'awful'*, and were nettled by the tutor's implied acceptance of inferior acting by her encouraging comment. She was, they felt, *'doing the disability cause no favours by being so lenient'*. An issue which arises here is the apparent sensitivity of students to appraisal from tutors – a sensitivity which in this case perhaps interprets the positive tone of encouragement as a misplaced allowance for disability, rather than allowance made for lack of experience. On the other hand, a number of other tutors, both for Missing Piece 4 and for Mind the Gap wondered whether in a teaching situation disabled students are sufficiently used to being told *'that's not good enough'*, whether they are perhaps more used to receiving positive comments.

The two students mentioned above were annoyed, too, as experienced performers at having, as they saw it, to waste time with other students who evidently lacked experience. Staff at CandoCo also referred to the frustration of students with each other's limitations, and at Mind the Gap there was a need for a period of adjustment as students became used to one another's strengths and weaknesses. For some students in all three projects, aside from their experience or ability as actors, the experience of working in the programme as a group, rather than as individuals was quite new. This is an issue encountered by pupils and teachers in mainstream as well as specialist learning contexts, where the 'ability to work in a group' is emphasized as an important element of transferable skill training, and was indeed given focus by all three projects.

A member of staff at Graeae commented upon the balance needed by teaching staff in encouraging the growth of confidence among students for whom most of the material is new, while holding the interest of *all* the students. As was noted above in relation to CandoCo staff, Missing Piece 4 tutors were changing their methodologies: *'finding a completely different accessible formats of teaching which challenges every single student'*.

An interviewee at The Oxford School of Drama pointed out that students in any group, as well as teachers, have to cope with people learning at different speeds, as well as the occasional student who may not have any disability but is continually difficult and disruptive. Another tutor commented upon the 'two way street' nature of the teacher/learner relationship, suggesting that students can learn by observing other students' work, so that when an exercise is underway which might not benefit every student immediately, observing

students can learn lessons from the way others are handling the work: a benefit which the observers may not immediately recognise. Staff perceived that the most able Missing Piece 4 students were not annoyed by the access level of the course, but were able, by adopting a positive attitude, to make use of the learning experiences offered and work at their own level. Difficulties would only arise, it was felt, if students have a belief that they already know material beforehand, and are not open to what they are learning.

A member of staff at the university suggested that ideally students would be channelled in different directions as appropriate to their previous experience, but resources were currently insufficient to allow this. An alternative view, expressed at CandoCo with a rather different, and smaller, cohort of students, was that an integrated group situation would allow more scope for the most able students to *'bounce ideas off one another'*. Because the approach is essentially improvisatory, there is a constant movement dialogue between the students, and with the guidance of tutors the vocabulary is constantly developing and growing. If over time it transpires that some students are constantly repeating their movements, then it can inhibit the development of the others. Without this scope a rather stagnated learning environment could arise. Both students and tutors commented on this.

Graeae referred to 'growing pains' among students finding themselves perhaps for the first time in a group where everyone has a disability, for most disabled people are used to being the only disabled person in a group. While this new experience has the advantages of levelling the playing field, so that individuals feel empowered and unified, it means too that others will need a share of the support available. Several tutors commented upon finding students in this group very supportive of each other, in ensuring that fellow students were not reliant solely on access workers for support. At the same time, a number of students in the group were disabled only recently, and one tutor suggested that it takes time to identify as disabled and feel positive about that: *'I think to come to a course, to a group like this, if you haven't gone through that process, would be very challenging'* (tutor for Graeae).

Strong levels of inter-student support were also evident on the CandoCo Foundation course workshops. Sighted students were particularly sensitive to the needs of the partially sighted and blind students, providing audio-descriptions as they performed their work to each other and remaining spatially alert.

The disparity in experience of actors/dancers, and their entry into a new learning situation, gave rise to challenging issues for the students, and no less so for the tutors, many of whom were teaching students with a disability for the first time.

A blind tutor for Graeae perceived a certain tentativeness in the approach of some, especially non-disabled tutors, both in their course related interaction with the students and in their approach to discipline. She felt that as a disabled person she was able perhaps to appreciate more easily the limits to which the students could be pushed, expressed as follows: *'I was determined that I wasn't going to sort of molly-coddle them because I'm disabled too and I know,..... what I can cope with. And so that's why I just thought: 'well, I don't care', and somebody fell over and I just said 'Oh, get up', I mean, you know, these things happen'*. (Tutor for Graeae).

This tutor emphasized that her colleagues should not be frightened of making mistakes, almost certain to occur with such a mixed range of people: the most important thing in the approach to teaching is, she felt, *'to get out of the students as much as you think they should be achieving'*. It is noteworthy that the learning disabled students on the Staging Change programme were pleased that at the beginning of a session with Shakespeare texts the tutor had simply handed over text sheets on the assumption that they could read them. They, too, expressed a wish not to be *'treated with kid gloves'*.

Interestingly, a senior member of staff at one of the provider schools described his own rather awed reaction to the robust approach of a disability trainer, who reported saying to disabled students: *'...either you come and train and you do an eight hour day or you don't; and the same in rehearsals, nobody's saying to me half way through the day: 'I'm tired!'.*(disability trainer).

*'That's the sort of thing we wouldn't have dared say!'* exclaimed the school interviewee, pondering the circumstances which would legitimately call for allowances to be made, and approaches to teaching which would safeguard the interests of both disabled and non-disabled students.

A number of tutors, from all three projects, identified experience as the basis for a confident and demanding approach to both discipline and performance in the classroom, within the capabilities of the students. Many tutors said that they had not tailored their material to accommodate the students' disabilities, but would make adjustments as needed in the classroom context. One indicated that he would be improvising in finding a way to work on the text with Derek and his support worker; he had decided to *'take it at their pace and not rush it'* In a rather similar vein, a tutor for Staging Change explained that he had decided to use non-amended exercises for the students. Having used the exercises on previous occasions with mainstream students, he was confident therefore of being able to make adjustments as necessary to accommodate the particular need of any individual: *'I felt secure with these two pieces, and therefore felt I would be able to cope with anyone who was tired or losing concentration'*. (Arts Ed. tutor). A second tutor for Staging Change confirmed that for him, as in dealing with any students *'there were plans A, B, C and D, you know you just have to have things, print outs with you of a range of things until you've taken the temperature, in a way, you know'*. (second Arts Ed. tutor).

It was pointed out that mixed ability teaching is a frequent feature of teaching for the London Metropolitan University degree course; in addition a group may include individuals with dyslexia or dyspraxia, for whom certain adaptations will have to be made, although clearly the number of disabled students in the group will not be so high, neither will the degree of their disability be so significant as was the case with Missing Piece 4. She felt that most teachers have the experience of teaching students with different learning needs, and are therefore used to adapting approaches. The needs of dyslexic students and visually impaired students have in common the need to find an alternative approach to sight reading: *'you're already beginning to examine some things that have been taken as given in drama training'* (tutor at Graeae).

A visually impaired tutor pointed out that disabled or not, almost every class is different in the approach needed to teaching, and within the class one student may have strengths in a certain area that the next person lacks. Bearing in mind the presence in a group of individuals who are unable to stand to undertake a grounding exercise, the tutor would introduce the exercise by saying: *'Ground yourself with the part of your body that makes contact with the earth, or with your chair making contact with the earth'* rather than *'Stand up, everybody and let's focus down into our feet'*.

A second visually impaired tutor was not always able easily to assess in advance what adjustments to her instructions might be necessary, but had found the students remarkably adept at finding and implementing their own adaptations.

For their part, tutors were finding that the practice of teaching on the projects was broadening their abilities as teachers.

Many of the tutors interviewed, for all three programmes, found their involvement stimulating in that it challenged their approach to teaching generally, with renewed insight into the fact

that students learn in different ways and into the need to bring a range of approaches to the classroom. One had noted, for example, that in the context of giving out information to students facilitated by a single interpreter, a break would be needed after twenty minutes. This had encouraged her to think about the structure of her teaching more generally, and to realise that most students need a slight change of task after twenty minutes.

Tutors for all three projects commented upon their relatively short period of engagement with the students, and the fact that course material needs a longer period of time to take root – comparison in terms of outcomes with a mainstream three year course are unrealistic. This issue was of particular relevance to Staging Change, as a part time course. A senior member of staff at Oxford School of Drama expressed this as follows: *‘...it was important to find something that could be done within three days that would be of value, never mind whether they have learning disabilities or not – it’s what can you give people within three days that they may be able to take away with them?’* (member of staff, Oxford School of Drama). Overall, evidence from feedback sessions with the students and with the theatre companies supports the view that tutors for all the projects succeeded in focusing their limited time, and making adjustments to material in class to enable students to gain maximum benefit from the material presented.

*Issues highlighted:*

- *Range of student experience and ability, relevant to each programme*
- *Need for advance knowledge of how students’ needs will affect access to the curriculum in terms of material preparation*
- *Need for medical diagnostic approach to students’ needs for vocational dance courses*
- *Importance of experience to facilitate adjustment of material as required in class*
- *Sensitivities among students and staff around ‘two sets of rules’*
- *Balance in demands on students which are both challenging and realistic*
- *Benefits for tutors in reassessing their approach to mainstream teaching*

### **4.3 Interaction and partnership with providers**

At the heart of Missing Piece 4’s evolution from the first years of the initiative has been Graeae’s partnership with London Metropolitan University: staff at both organisations were agreed that the evaluator’s recommendation for Graeae to link up with an educational institution was an essential step forward. As expressed by a member of staff at Graeae to a London Metropolitan University tutor: *‘It works both ways, doesn’t it, we bring in our practice in terms of how to make it accessible and how to retain hard to reach learners, and you bring the academic, or quality, to teaching and learning...and quality assurance, programme monitoring’.* (member of staff, Graeae).

While staff at both organisations admitted to some ongoing problems because of the rather disparate nature of a small Arts organisation and the bureaucracy of a large university, they perceived the backing of project champions at a high level in the university and the personal commitment of two particular staff at a more operational level as important elements of the partnership’s favourable progress.

The interest of a project champion and enthusiast emerges frequently in a range of contexts as an issue crucial to success, and is clearly one factor influencing too the extent to which D&DA provider schools have engaged with the flexible provision programmes. Staff at Mind the Gap and at Graeae commented upon the enthusiasm of the principals at partner schools. They had been *‘fully behind the work’*, and the success of the partnership relationship was due in no small part to this. No less important has been the enthusiasm of

individual tutors who have engaged with the project. Among those tutors new to teaching learning disabled students or students with physical and sensory impairments, it is noteworthy that several were inspired to do so in part because of personal knowledge of someone with a physical or learning disability. It seems likely that such links were helpful in diminishing the feelings of apprehension so frequently expressed by those teaching in this context for the first time.

Nevertheless, companies reported slow progress in brokering partnerships. As late as September 2004 Graeae was able to name only one provider school which had promised definite involvement with the programme. Others who expressed interest in the programme were reportedly constrained by limited resources. By the end of February 05 Graeae was able to report that three tutors from Arts Ed., were keen to work with the company in voice and movement, but it had proved *'a little difficult to match our gaps with their skills'*, because of uncertainty about exactly where synergies might lie. A senior member of staff felt that her later, less specifically focused approach to ALRA was perhaps a more appropriate model for the future: *'Look, you've got a specialism here in teaching acting to camera, or radio acting. Can you come and deliver something for us?'* During the course's first semester, Graeae were awarded additional funding by DfES to provide specific TV and radio acting training through ALRA.

A good match was found with the expertise of a voice tutor from Arts Ed. who worked with the Graeae students on monologues for the showcase. In advance of his sessions, he observed the Missing Piece 4 classes, and had discussions with senior Graeae staff.

From the schools' side, Arts Ed. commented upon a good partnership relationship with Mind the Gap sufficiently enduring to accommodate a frank exchange of views when necessary. *'I think we have been able to build something with them that we feel has integrity, you know, we're confident with it'* (senior member of staff, Arts Ed).

A member of staff at Arts Ed. emphasized the challenge presented by the *'sheer range of disability'* among potential students: from the student who is a wheelchair user whose major requirement is mobility round the building, to the learning disabled person whose needs are very different. Notwithstanding a school's willingness to contribute to training students with a disability, the right approach from the schools' perspective is, he suggested, to make alliances with companies that are already working with potentially talented disabled performers whose employment status with the companies is a testament to their commitment and talent. Far less satisfactory or workable, from the schools' perspective, is to run its own recruitment campaign: *'we're here and if you're a disabled person with commitment and some talent, come and see us'* (member of staff, Arts Ed).

A member of staff at Mind the Gap was keen to emphasize the company's success in engaging with four of the mainstream schools, bearing in mind the part time status of Staging Change, and attributed this to the fact that a new programme was being created.

Where partnerships worked particularly well, Graeae and Mind the Gap were able to offer students something quite outside to the company's own training, as for example, the radio and TV work offered by ALRA. This worked particularly favourably if the schools could see it as a self-contained project and take the practice associated with it back into their own school, having observed the students' progress. A small block of well planned and well thought through work was also a good basis for a continuing partnership relationship.

It is important to note that time for discussion, adaptation and negotiation may be needed if partnerships are to develop satisfactorily for both theatre company and training organisation, and avoid the situation, perceived by one school of an approach which seems to say: *'this is what we want. Can you provide it – yes, or no?'* In a number of cases the relationship

building process was aided at tutor level by longstanding professional links between organisations. Adequate communication between provider school and company prior to the commencement of a course was essential too. In its absence students might feel (perhaps erroneously) that their programme did not count for a great deal in the minds of the host provider and tutors could find themselves unable to prepare adequately for their work. Lack of communication can clearly lead to hitches on the day of delivery, leaving the provider school to feel that the event has reflected unfavourably on the organisation.

Senior members of staff at one school suggested the need for applications for flexible funding to be made jointly. This would mean that the partnership relationship would exist at least in embryonic form first: *'so that there's a genuine and equal partnership between a specialised company and ourselves, and you decide precisely what it is you're trying to achieve, how you're going to achieve it, what each partner is going to provide and get out of it, and then make an application'* (senior member of staff, D&DA school). A colleague agreed on the need for more equitable partnership relationships between the schools and training providers, preferring that the schools should be involved *'in a primary role, rather than as sub-contractors'*. Both interviewees sensed that the schools' expertise had been rather undervalued in this respect.

In their summary evaluation report for the LSC Candoco indicated that they are *'committed to finding an educational institution as a partner for the Foundation Course as soon as possible'* as a way to facilitate sustainability for the course and to locate it in a dance environment. However it is HEI institutions outside the D&DA scheme who have expressed interest in pursuing this. There was no response from D&DA provider schools to Candoco's offer of INSET. While Candoco reported inviting representatives from the D&DA schools to attend showcases of student work and student performances, observation at one of these showcases at Sadlers Wells revealed the presence of representatives from only two D&DA schools, whereas Higher Education, the Arts Council and the broader contemporary dance community were well represented. Candoco staff commented: *'Only Arts Educational School (London) responded positively to the approach for student exchange and this worked successfully with Arts Ed. students attending a dress rehearsal of Foundation Course students and an Arts Ed. tutor leading a musical theatre workshop, and Candoco dancers leading a ballet class at Arts Ed. school.'*(Candoco staff).

Candoco acknowledged potential barriers to schools' direct involvement with the programme: *'A barrier is the fact that the teachers lack experience in teaching disabled students. A second barrier for the D&DA schools is the issue of assessment, as they are wary of compromising their standards'*. Accordingly, senior members of staff at Candoco felt the need to work with teachers *'known to be able to draw out the students' potential, and these may not be teachers in D&DA funded schools'*. (senior member of staff, Candoco).

Senior staff felt that the Foundation Course delivery and content is more consistent with techniques and training that take place in the Conservatoire schools, such as The Place and The Laban Centre, where students are training for the contemporary and independent dance sector and market, rather than the musical theatre sector – the market to which the D&DA schools tend to work. Staff and student exchanges have taken place with both organisations, the most substantial of which was a two week residency at The Place in early July at the close of the Foundation Course, discussed in section 4.4. Under the guidance of choreographer Adam Benjamin, Foundation Course students joined second year Conservatoire students in creating an integrated performance alongside other end of year productions. Audience response and interviews with staff and students from both institutions and the choreographer confirmed the success of the project.

The Conservatoire Director and several members of staff expressed their support and ongoing commitment to working with future CandoCo students and talked of its importance for the development of their own students.

CandoCo remains committed to finding a partner educational institution, to house the Foundation Course by the beginning of the 2006/7 academic year. Such a partnership would provide additional infrastructure, and no less importantly, the necessary peer support for students and institutional ethos as a basis for an integrated dance-cultural setting. D&DA schools were approached with this aim before and during the pilot year, but none had the necessary space available for the Foundation Course from 2006/7.

CandoCo would welcome the opportunity to work more closely with the D&DA schools in future, but now feels a need to look at developing a different strategy in relation to building partnerships with D&DA schools for its Foundation Course. Provision of INSET training sessions for D&DA school staff on inclusive teaching is an element of partnership collaboration which remains to be discussed for future years. Whatever the outcome, there is a commitment to continue to provide opportunities for exchange on a project basis in the future.

Graeae too reported a poor response to its offer of INSET training, receiving only two replies. Resources are an important issue here, with the danger that a positive response from several schools could mean an untenable workload for key members of company staff. The ideal would be for schools to be able to call upon the services of a team of experts as and when they require assistance.

#### **4.4 Dissemination**

A tutor from London Metropolitan University saw as a starting point for dissemination the conference held with Graeae at the beginning of their partnership relationship, which facilitated sharing information and pooling ideas about ways of bringing more disabled people into higher education and into drama schools. In the meantime, this tutor had shared a platform with a key member of staff working in Widening Participation at the University at conferences in Liverpool and Washington, USA. While more papers were planned, more support in this area was needed, for delivery of the course and dissemination of practice was falling to the same individuals, creating a heavy drain upon resources.

Mind the Gap has recently recruited a PhD student teaching drama at the University of Northumbria whose research will focus on the area of training and development in the Arts, raising the profile of disability training more widely.

This company highlighted its preference for resident tutors who can learn from the experience and put this back into their school. In practice, while there were many examples of freelance tutors who work frequently for the same school, it seems likely that their opportunities for dissemination among colleagues might not be so frequent.

The showcasing of students' work is an important element of dissemination for all three projects, not least because of the presence of key individuals from the industry, attracted by the high reputation of the three companies. A senior member of staff at Graeae expressed enthusiasm for artistic collaboration, with Graeae's tutors undertaking some teaching at the provider schools. It was suggested that a raised profile for Missing Piece in the Arts field would encourage a wider audience at its productions to nurture greater understanding of its nature: *'Missing Piece is so much more than just physical access or having a sign language interpreter in the room, it's about really pushing those boundaries, you know, it's about performance'* (senior member of staff, Graeae).



CandoCo have used two showcases of performance work, reviews and magazine articles to disseminate information about the work and practices of the Foundation Course. The first public showcase on the evening of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2005, at the Lilian Baylis Theatre, Sadlers Wells, as part of this company's 'Connect '05' dance festival, was introduced by Jeanette Siddal, Director of Dance at Arts Council England. Solo pieces choreographed and performed by the students to a full house were followed by a group piece choreographed under the direction of a course tutor, but using the students' own movement ideas. The second half was a performance by CandoCo of 'The Human Suite', choreographed by Stephen Petronio. The evening concluded with a post performance discussion, led by the course director with both students and dance company members participating from the stage. No formal audience survey was undertaken, but CandoCo staff noted the presence of two D&DA providers, staff and students from the Conservatoire and the Laban Centre, a representative from the Royal Academy of Dance, staff from two universities, staff and students from the Graeae Missing Piece 4 project, two Arts Council Directors, several independent dance performers, and the Artistic Director of Sadlers Wells Theatre. Jo McConnell's review of the performance was published in the third week of March on the Disability Arts Online website <sup>5</sup>.

The second showcase was an informal lunch-time sharing of the integrated project with the Conservatoire students at The Place on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2005. The audience included CandoCo staff, parents, a representative from CDET and Conservatoire staff, choreographers and students.

Paradoxically, difficulties for the schools in meeting the companies' preference for a small number of core tutors to put into the programmes for a sustained period of teaching had positive repercussions for dissemination. A member of staff at Arts Ed. noted that there have been instead several teachers coming out of their core role to teach on the programmes for very short periods, who have returned to share experiences with their colleagues, even to change attitudes. He noted, too, that had the programmes been larger in scope, it would have been necessary to hire peripatetic teachers, rather than those employed by the school, which would have again resulted in less effective dissemination practice. He commented: *'What you have to have is small, functional schemes, which can use core staff; and if you do that and you feed your core staff, it cascades, not just down into the staff room where you might have twenty people listening to five people talking about their real experiences, but it also comes down into their teaching and into the students as well'* (member of staff, Arts Ed.).

An interviewee from London Metropolitan University, involved in discussions brokering the relationship with Graeae to develop Missing Piece, and engaged with the Arts Learning Partnership, spoke of current work in developing training for non disabled directors/producers wishing to become more inclusive in their practice, based upon Graeae's approaches to theatre making. There are plans to disseminate practice developed through Missing Piece, alongside a DVD produced as a teaching resource and distance learning package, in support of a pilot teaching programme.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.disabilityarts.com](http://www.disabilityarts.com)

## 4.5 Student outcomes and progression

### 4.5.1 Progression to integrated training

#### 4.5.1.1 Tutors' views

Many tutors for all three programmes commented favourably on the enthusiasm and dedication of the students, one tutor for Staging Change commending *'their honesty, their approaching things without bothering about the kind of conventional approaches, their openness and their freshness and their commitment, and the way they work together'* (tutor for Staging Change). Nevertheless, some tutors for all three programmes commented upon the great deal of time needed to bring students up to production level performance. One tutor reported absolutely no difficulty in working with the Staging Change students, and could see ways of working forward with them as a group. She also felt that a one-off integrated session with mainstream students might work reasonably well. However, she perceived difficulties in a fully-inclusive model: *'you notice it even in our students sometimes, people get very frustrated with students who are just not as sharp, or as on the ball, talented, or whatever, and of course they have to learn to live with that....but when you're putting on a production, you need the material to be able to do that particular production, ...and the difficulty is in doing a whole range of things, and the pace that's required'*.(tutor for Staging Change).

Two members of staff at Arts Ed. were of the view that some degree of inclusion is desirable, and feasible, given the adjustments which teachers are continually making as a normal part of their professional life: *'in a way we adjust our teaching all the time the group that we've got anyway, because every group is different'* (member of staff, Arts Ed.). In this way, the needs of a student whose knee was put out of joint was given an alternative task involving observation and written work, enabling her to progress through the course. Students' needs would be addressed on a case-by-case basis in this way. It had to be accepted that there may be certain things that various students simply are unable to do, in which case alternatives need to be found, or strategies adopted to help the students in other ways. In so doing, however, staff emphasized that training should be integrated: *'we don't want to take people with disabilities and put them in a ghetto'* (member of staff, Arts Ed).

A member of staff at the Oxford School of Drama suggested that there may be better ways of integrating drama schools with organisations like Mind the Gap than rehearsing audition pieces from set texts to enable students to apply to drama schools. A provisional suggestion was that joint summer schools could be a useful supplement to the work being done by some theatre schools.

A tutor for Arts Ed. suggested that the next step for the Staging Change students, as regards their training, would be to see them in a mixed class situation, and observe their reaction. Notwithstanding the good level of focus apparent in the context of one-off tutoring sessions, he was unsure how they would cope with an on-going process: *'it's that intensity of work, over three years, really, and not over a two week or five week period'* . (Arts Ed. tutor) A freelance tutor for Guildford School of Acting expressed similar reservations, noting the rarity of students in mainstream drama training: *'...there's got to be something very special about you, actually, for you to be able to cope with the course if you're disabled....I can't think of a drama school where that isn't the case'*.(freelance tutor).

While one of the Missing Piece 4 students felt that the demanding physical nature of a mainstream acting course would put this beyond the reach of many in the group, the tutor felt that this need not be the case, assuming that students are in relative good health apart

from their disability: *'Energy levels can be an issue, but I don't think a physical inability to move one's legs or arms would ever hold a person back'* (tutor for Graeae).

This tutor suggested that the same would hold true for the requirement to make ballet movements. A student without the use of leg movements would explore balance from within the wheelchair. Clearly it would not be possible to do pliee, but the movement would be observed, and students would understand that this is about creating a shape with the body, and would explore upper body movement. The core question, she suggested, is to do with the purpose of art, a question which individual schools and educators in general need to consider: *'[they] have to maybe broaden their thinking about first of all what the purpose of art is – is ballet about making a pretty picture that looks exactly the way that you expect it to look every time, or is it a human expression with some structure around it? If it's human expression with structure around it then I can do that whether I'm on my feet or sitting in a chair. My structure might look slightly different, but I'm maintaining the structure that I can'*. (tutor, Graeae).

This view received support from a director/writer, in the context of acting: *'In the end, it isn't about being able to walk, or even, necessarily, speak English for a deaf performer. It is something much bigger than that. It is about having an understanding of character and interrelation, you know. And so you then, as director, find different ways of story telling through being faced with these people, whose abilities are not the same as a group of drama school students'*. (Tutor for Missing Piece 4)

As noted previously, the CandoCo Foundation Course students had two opportunities to connect with able-bodied dance students. The first, in which Arts Educational school students observed a Foundation Course dress rehearsal, offered little opportunity for interaction. The second, described in section 4.3, was a fully integrated choreographic project. For his part, the choreographer, noting the ease with which the two sets of students interacted socially and 'gelled' as a group, felt that working as a discrete group for most of their course would inhibit the development of the Foundation Course students and mean a lost opportunity for able-bodied dance students to gain practical experience of diverse ways of working. Working on shared improvisatory tasks which explored the space and the idea of movement dialogue between the dancers had allowed the students to work on an equal footing, because it was not dependent upon conforming to a specific technical vocabulary. He recognised the need for gearing the course to meet individuals' specific needs, and keeping this in balance with the notion of working in an integrated environment. Linking the Foundation Course with other courses, for example the Laban community dance course would enable an ongoing, year-long relationship between the two groups of students.

#### **4.5.1.2 Students' views**

##### **4.5.1.2.1 Disabled students**

Student interviews mid-way through the course showed the CandoCo Foundation students' frustration with their lack of interaction with non-disabled students: *'that's what we want to do, really to integrate with somebody else outside ... we're in this studio, everyday, it's just so isolating'*. Students saw the need for a termly integrated project to challenge them with new vocabulary and ways of working. They also felt that this would benefit non-disabled students, providing them with an awareness of issues on which to draw, whether or not they found careers in integrated dance.

While students initially felt strongly that the whole course should be integrated, staff were of the view that the students were not ready to work choreographically with non-disabled vocational dance students until towards the end of the second term. After the final integrated projects, two students had changed their minds: one felt that the course should be

confined to disabled students because of the *'very challenging'* environment at The Place; the second agreed, finding the Conservatoire environment *'competitive'* and therefore tiring and difficult to sustain. A third student felt that the uniqueness of the course should be preserved: *'the minute you lose these courses, that's it, you know, and we're back to square one, this is the only course of its kind'*. By contrast, one student felt strongly that there is a need for disabled dancers to integrate with non-disabled dancers as a basis for doing so later on in the world of work, perceiving the need for *'the right balance of people to bounce off each other'*. Overall, students were in agreement that there should be more opportunities for integrated work, with the course based in a dance institution.

In the course of their work with the Conservatoire, CandoCo students were surprised and relieved to find the non-disabled students interested in them as dancers and participating in exactly the same way in the workshops, expressed as follows: *'we all have the same language and the same approach to making dance'* (CandoCo student) and *'(name) asked us to improvise and we all just did,... even the other [Conservatoire] students, so, you know, there's no wrong or right,...whether you have no sight or you're in a chair, or what, it doesn't matter'* (CandoCo student).

Students from all three projects enjoyed the parts of their programme which brought them together with mainstream students, and would have appreciated more such opportunities, though several were unsure whether they would be able to cope with the pace of a fully inclusive course, and whether this would be welcomed by mainstream students. Mainstream students commented that they found that integrated sessions contributed positively to their own learning, and would welcome opportunities to engage with learning disabled or physically disabled students in future.

The Mind the Gap students would have welcomed the opportunity (though with some apprehension) to work with Arts. Ed. students in London. Mind the Gap staff saw this *'as a next stage that would make sense in terms of developing the students'*. However, funding considerations precluded this. Travel and accommodation (particularly in London) cut deeply into the budget: it was pointed out that November's residency had cost £1500.

Several of the Graeae students expressed at an early stage of the programme their wish for greater inclusion in the Performing Arts degree, both at curriculum level and at the level of interaction with the mainstream students.

#### **4.5.1.2.2 Mainstream students**

In common with the disabled students with whom they worked, the Conservatoire students expressed similar feelings of change and enjoyment and all commented that working with the CandoCo students had broadened their understanding of dance and introduced new ways of working which were not based on the use of a set technical vocabulary, expressed by one as follows: *'It brings a whole new way of working which can also be used like in general teaching...it just opens up a whole new area, and that has a knock-on effect with the way you go about everything else, as well'*. They found that the project had also helped them develop as dancers: *'we're used to working with the same people and the same type of movement, but being in a different situation and having to think...in a different way...your movement vocabulary has, I think, expanded because you've had to look for different ways. So rather than being stuck in your normal routine it has kind of pushed us'*. This group of Conservatoire students had elected to take a third year module in working with disability and felt that this, together with the CandoCo project would help them further their careers following graduation.

Two mainstream students from Oxford School of Drama found that working with the Mind the Gap students enabled them to consolidate their own learning, at the same time finding new

ways of approaching their work. Both students said they would be happy to work with these or other learning disabled students again, in episodes of integrated training, rather than in a fully integrated course. They felt that the pace of a fully integrated programme may not be compatible with the stamina of some disabled students, who would need more time to practise their performance.

As regards Graeae, the willingness of third year Performing Arts students taking the Directing module to work alongside disabled students is demonstrated by the fact that they chose a number of the Missing Piece 4 students by audition to act in their pieces. Rehearsals for these pieces were held outside core teaching time and presented to mainstream third year students and to teachers assessing the module. In addition, third year students taking the Community Theatre module working with the Missing Piece students on preparing and delivering workshops in primary and secondary schools (an important potential source of post-course employment for mainstream as well as disabled students).

### 4.5.3 Practical Issues

One tutor for Graeae was cautious about prospects for greater inclusion in training generally, for while talent is the major prerequisite for entry, this is tempered by physical access barriers, as well as a lack of expertise among staff in schools in training students with a disability. He expressed reservations as follows:

*'There is no reason within a drama school why they couldn't be accommodated if they have the requisite talent to get in. But there are a lot of physical barriers. Most drama schools I have taught in don't have wheelchair access. They would be confused about what to do with somebody who didn't move particularly quickly within a dance module. They would be wondering how to assimilate somebody within a dance module, say if they weren't very good at standing up. Most schools wouldn't know how to begin to accommodate somebody who was blind in getting information out.....'* (tutor for Graeae)

Another tutor referred to the wide range of talent and ability represented by the Missing Piece 4 group, which would be an important indicator of students' success on the Performing Arts degree course: *'...some of them would cope very well and some would not, according to, you know, their intellectual ability and their disability'*. A senior member of Graeae staff was more positive about integration with the Performing Arts degree though physical space and timetables could nevertheless present difficulties: problems of practice had been largely overcome because of the involvement of two full time and five part-time tutors from the university. While Missing Piece is accredited and validated at below degree level, she was confident of the ability of the students to work with mainstream students through the degree, noting that the third year directors had chosen several of the Missing Piece to take part in the third year productions.

*'There shouldn't really be a barrier now, there's so much of the practice that we're delivering on Missing Piece, which is now part of the Performing Arts degree'* (Senior member of staff, Graeae)

Notwithstanding this wealth of practice experience, however, one tutor pointed out that there could be barriers on the Performing Arts course for students with certain impairments. Full BSL users present practical and attitudinal challenges for inexperienced staff. He suggested that a solution would be for the whole group regularly to spend a little time learning some sign language, noting that some Missing Piece students do learn a little of this naturally as they progress through the programme. (BSL was also included in the Staging Change programme, and was proclaimed as a valuable medium through which all actors can improve their communication skills). He felt that the mainstream students would gain immeasurably from the inclusion of such disabled students on their course, though he felt

they may be *'rather scared initially'* and hesitated to say that they would be amenable to this change.

#### **4.5.4 Staff resistance to inclusion**

A senior member of Graeae staff perceived a great deal of resistance from within mainstream drama training to inclusion: *'It's about fear: 'how do I make it accessible?' There is still [this] concern when it comes to teaching a range of disabled students'*.

In a similar vein, staff at CandoCo reported resistance from staff at some D&DA schools to inclusion, based on three principal concerns: Firstly teachers were intimidated by the thought of adapting techniques in the way they would need to, and secondly by a lack of training to do it; but thirdly, and equally importantly, a frequently held view, if not always expressed, concerned the desirability of offering training to disabled dancers: *'Well, why are we bothering to train these people, there's no jobs for them'* was a reported comment. CandoCo staff felt that acceptance of the concept of inclusion was still far away for most mainstream dance schools, though progress in this direction was beginning to be made in the theatre world. In part this can perhaps be traced to the fact that a part on the West End stage is one often voiced major criterion for the perceived success of dance school graduates, and possession of a certain body type is often a pre-condition for such selection. In this view, a career in the independent dance sector is simply not as highly regarded. CandoCo staff were considering the possibility of initiating a small action research project with a D&DA school to identify areas of difficulty and perhaps suggest some solutions.

For CandoCo as for the other two companies, the long term goal is that the training will be fully integrated into the mainstream vocational training structures. This company has highlighted a need for a viable action plan for transition from segregated disabled provision. The company suggests that such a policy would receive wide support, having received numerous requests from non-disabled dancers for an integrated dance training. CandoCo reported that as a first step, schools at the stage of beginning to institute dance and disability have contacted the company asking firstly for *'pointers'* then asking that their mainstream students observe a Foundation Course class. The telling reaction from students was: *'We don't want to be in this fishbowl position'* (CandoCo students). It is important that steps along the way to integration/inclusion are sensitive to the comfort levels of disabled students.

*Issues highlighted:*

- *Commitment of students to their training*
- *Level of disability includes 'extreme' in some cases*
- *Remaining resistance to inclusion among staff*
- *Overall, support among staff and students for progression towards inclusion at this stage, rather than 'all or nothing' model*

#### **4.6 Achievements and Post project destinations**

The question: *'What happens to our students?'* is clearly crucial to all involved at every level in course provision, as was the question expressed sometimes at mainstream D&DA schools in the light of an over supplied market, and voiced at times with a hint of trepidation by staff with all three projects is: *'Are we setting them up to fail?'*

##### *4.6 Evidence for each project's success*

###### *4.6.1 Course completion*

As regards completion, all the Missing Piece 4 students passed the course, and staff pointed out that the number of credits gained provided insight into the different levels achieved by each individual.

In 2004 the 12 students who completed Missing Piece 3 progressed to touring with the company. This number of students had, however, proved too large and too expensive a commitment for this small company's touring plans. In any case, a member of staff pointed out that while students have received high quality training over the nine months of their programme, this could not be equivalent to the three years training received by other competing applicants. It was therefore decided that there would be no automatic link between the Missing Piece 4 programme and a touring contract: places were limited to eight. This year all Missing Piece 4 students were offered an audition for the touring production, 'George Dandin', and four declined: one because of poor health, one decided she was not ready to tour, a third student decided against becoming a traditional actor and had been offered a role as an assistant to the director, and the fourth had already booked a holiday in Egypt. Of the seven students who auditioned, three were successful. A Graeae representative reported that much had been learned by these three during the tour: the company would consider them for future tours, but she pointed out that the ideal would be for other companies also to offer them work.

All five Staging Change students completed the course successfully, marked by an end of course certificate signed by the school principals. For Staging Change students, the end of year production of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* took place as part of Bradford's summer Festival in a 'big top' venue owned by the NoFit State Circus. The BSL interpreted performance gave the Staging Change students a prominent position within the show, which included other actors with the Mind the Gap theatre company. A member of staff observed that the show was seen by a good number of professionals from the region, but was unlikely to reach a wider potential market. He pointed out that the Staging Change students had benefited from a relatively short burst of intensive training which would in itself put them at a disadvantage with students who come through three years of training at a mainstream school. Such a comparison would be unfair and would, he suggested '*...be setting people up to fail if we were to present people's work and say in some way that it was, you know, to be seen and read alongside the work of a student who'd gone through that process*' (member of staff, Mind the Gap).

All the CandoCo Foundation Course students completed the course successfully and have received CandoCo certificates pending certification by LOCN. Their end of course production, an integrated project with Conservatoire students, is described in a previous section. All have plans for further work and study on completion of the course.

#### **4.6.2 Immediate post-course destinations**

One student from CandoCo, Barbara, will be taking summer dance courses in the U.S. and then resuming her BA there. Lack of opportunities for dancers with disabilities in her area mean that she plans to set up her own classes and projects: '*I might set up a few dance classes, hopefully, like I'm just opening up a space so there is a studio available, yeah, so it's exciting...It will be exciting to go back to Seattle now, after I've had this training and see what the dance world...Maybe I'll set up a foundation course*'.

Julie, who came to the course with a BTEC National Diploma in the Performing Arts from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) plans to continue her studies and her research: '*Well I've just auditioned to go to Birkbeck College, so hopefully I'll go there...it's a foundation course, but it's only happening once a week, so during the other days I'm going*

*to go to the other classes to continue my training. And also I'm applying for a grant to do my research project..'*

Stella, who had worked with one specialist integrated dance/theatre company, has been offered a place with another so that she can continue to perform and to teach. She has also been shortlisted for a project with Mind The Gap Theatre Company.

Beryl, who also came to the course with a BTEC National Diploma in the Performing Arts from the RNIB, has recently become a member of a semi-professional integrated theatre/dance company and will also be going onto an HND Community arts course at the New Vic: *'to extend my dance vocabulary to African and Asian, and just continuing...more teaching, as well. I'm very interested in teaching, bringing people together, and going into communities and just making something.'*

Robert, who came to the course with a BA in Performing Arts from Birkbeck, is hoping to go on a drama based contemporary dance course and is also applying for 'Access to Work' in order to set up his own performing and teaching company.

Two students from Missing Piece 4 applied for the Performing Arts degree course at London Metropolitan University; one was offered a place on the first year of this course, the second student was offered a place on the second year of the degree. However, a university tutor had advised him to apply instead for a one year MA acting degree instead, because the student had already an undergraduate qualification in Fine Arts.

A tutor for Graeae pointed out that some of the students on the course already had degrees, and these students were *'not doing it for the qualification, they're doing it for the vocational training'*. Students were applying for Missing Piece because they found themselves unable to access suitable Performing Arts training, even though the course may be at a level below their ideal requirements.

One of the students accepted for Graeae's touring production had applied to ALRA for a place on their one year Acting course, having decided at a fairly late stage that she needs more training. She had also attended an audition with the Oxford Touring Company, with another Missing Piece 4 student, both having been talent spotted at the Graduate Showcase.

Two of the students had been accepted for BBC/Channel 4/Actors' Centres' Bursary Scheme for Disabled Actors: a remarkable achievement, as only 25 of the 250 applicants were successful.

One Graeae student David, with no previous acting experience decided by the end of the programme that his future will lie in writing, rather than in acting. Nevertheless he found the course *'absolutely wonderful'*. For him the voice classes had proved particularly useful, teaching him how to work and breath and transforming his previously *'tiny voice'*.

Mind the Gap was already aware of the short term progression routes of the five students on completion of the programme:

Beth was back with Mind the Gap as part of the acting company, and a member of staff commented very positively upon her increased confidence and more assured approach to her work following the Staging Change programme. She, as the other students, had benefited not only from acquiring new skills, but from the credibility and sense of achievement from working with the mainstream schools.



Jack, who was continuing to be a freelance performer, alongside touring with Mind the Gap, was described as an *'emerging star'*, and in this sense an inspiration to others.

Two students would be returning to work with their previous companies as more experienced performers: Stephen, who had dance experience prior to Staging Change was going back to work for Stop Gap, and Denzel would be continuing to work with Moment by Moment. Lisa would be resuming work with Theatre Resource.

#### **4.6.3 Looking ahead: for students**

It appears that none of the students from CandoCo have chosen to audition for HE dance courses or for courses at D&D provider schools. In general terms, however, a member of staff at CandoCo expressed the view that the area of highest potential for progression lies in community dance performance and leadership, also in adult education, although it was not expected from the start of the course that the students would be ready to perform professionally after just one year's training. She felt concern that while certain students might be able to progress to further study, some students would never be strong on reading and writing. This could well jeopardise their chances of entry into Higher Education dance schools, because dance providers at this level might not be sufficiently flexible to acknowledge non-academic learning.

A member of Graeae staff estimated that about half the group would find their future in the profession as actors. It was emphasized that progression is really up to the students, for some of them were finding out whether in fact they want to be actors, or whether they want to make theatre, create their own theatre, audition for either mainstream companies or theatre or dance companies with a commitment to employing disabled actors. One member of staff suggested that some students may need to broaden their perspective on theatre, considering openings other than 'straight' theatre. It was suggested that auditioning for and securing parts would be a *'harder journey'* than working with alternative theatre, because those exploring integrated work tend to be more experimental (and this is an issue pertinent too to the choices of non-disabled students).

Interviewees commented that although the situation may have been slowly changing over the last three to four years, there still lingers a perception at drama schools that there are few employment prospects for disabled performers. More positively, Mind the Gap affirmed the availability of work for students with learning disabilities: *...we do have work ourselves, and we know the work is out there 'cos we get requested for it.'* (member of staff, Mind the Gap).

A member of staff indicated that a significant benefit arising from the Staging Change programme was the newly forged links between these companies: consideration would be given to how students at other theatre venues could work with Mind the Gap, or conversely, how actors from Mind the Gap could work with these other companies.

Students from all three programmes have given permission for their contact details to be retained with a view to tracking their future progress.

#### **4.6.4 Looking ahead: the companies**

As regards future programmes, Mind the Gap is (at time of writing) at an early stage of considering ways of moving the work towards accreditation, taking the Trinity course

structure as a possible model. The work done with students could then be tracked more clearly, with transparent routes towards and evidence of progression. It was hoped that advice from mainstream schools would be forthcoming to aid this move forward.

Discussions with partner schools would also centre upon brokering slightly longer residencies, as well as developing some opportunities for integration for the learning disabled students

Overall, there was agreement that steps towards inclusion will be small and gradual. It was felt that one important positive factor will be the influence in a few schools of the principal as a 'champion' of inclusion which will work at staff level as more individuals have the experience of teaching inclusively; an increase in the number of mainstream schools engaging with projects in partnership relationships with the theatre companies will also support the momentum towards inclusion.

#### *Issues highlighted:*

- *All students on the three programmes completed their programme successfully*
- *Students have found progression routes in further training (though not at D&DA schools) or in the industry (including independent dance/theatre), identifying individual strengths*
- *Widespread support for more episodes of integration with mainstream programmes*
- *Among provider school interviewees, views on a fully inclusive model of training were mixed, but a significant number voiced reservations, particularly regarding students with severe physical or learning disabilities*
- *Students (both project students and mainstream) expressed some doubts and apprehension in relation to a fully integrated training model*
- *Need for incremental numbers of tutors experienced in teaching disabled students to advance inclusion agenda*
- *Need to challenge organisational and society wide perceptions of the nature and purpose of art*

## **5. Legacy from the Projects/Conclusions**

### **5.1 Introductory comments**

*Inclusive education and training must be considered with reference to two separate issues: rights and efficacy.*

The question of rights has been developed substantially over the past 40 years. Disability rights may be seen as a subset of the debate regarding the rights of a range of citizens who are, intentionally or by default, subject to adverse discrimination. Hence disability rights have some common ground with debates concerning the place and opportunities of women, minority ethnic groups and indeed children. Issues addressed in these debates include equality of opportunity and removal of barriers to the attainment of equality.

There is, however, a specific difference with respect to the rights of persons with a disability: the nature of the disability per se. There is overlap in factors such as attitude, of society at large, or in the present case, the schools and their view of the nature of their art. In addition, and to a greater extent, a person with a significant disability requires not just a positive attitude but also skilled support to facilitate successful development.

There is, therefore, a need also to consider the effectiveness of training. Which methods work best for a particular student: to what extent are these modifications to those already used in the schools? Or are they different in quality? Or both? Within the overall context of

inclusion one factor that arises is to what degree should education and training be in separate sessions or fully within inclusive sessions? Or should there be a progression from the former to the latter? More complex scenarios might be imagined. However, the point is that both rights and effectiveness are central issues to address.

## 5.2 Policy issues

As noted by a number of interviewees, a momentum has been built up with the projects at Graeae, Mind the Gap and CandoCo against the background of the work of the disability rights movement of the 1970's and 1980's, culminating in the Disability Discrimination Acts, and the DfES D&DA initiative, which should be largely self-perpetuating in terms of developing creative thinking around disability training in the Arts. One respondent drew a parallel with developments in the USA which have seen the evolution of disability studies as a mainstream interest in receipt of cross-disciplinary input. The dynamics of this interest were, he observed, producing conferences with a potential to influence thought and action in the UK.

Notwithstanding these promising trends, a senior member of staff at one of the schools felt that currently at policy level the long term goals of disability projects in the UK, of which these three are an example, are not clearly defined. Definition of long term goals would derive from long term future planning, an issue not yet tackled by DfES or other relevant bodies. He suggested that as well as raising awareness of disability issues, some progress was already being made by the drama schools towards the goal of encouraging more students with disabilities to apply to them by adapting the prospectus and making it more user friendly. This interviewee asked, rhetorically, what is being expected of the schools, whether to suggest to companies ways in which they can teach to bring students to a higher standard, whether to give the companies ideas.

All three companies have emphasized that a secure funding base is crucial to initiatives of which these programmes are examples. For example, CandoCo Dance Company subsidised this Foundation Course to approximately 25% in the form of staff time and in-kind studio and capital costs: a level which is not sustainable for the company. While it was recognised that the course is expensive in the long term without partnership with an educational institution, it was anticipated that this can be remedied, and that the accreditation of the course will now provide some level of sustainability. The programme's current insecure position should be seen as a threat to aspiring dancers with disabilities, for there is still no viable alternative to the Foundation Course in Dance. More generally on the issue of funding, several freelance tutors were dissatisfied with the level of pay, considered 'very low' at £25 per hour, and a level at which many professionals might be disinclined to work.

It seems likely that the momentum towards inclusion will slacken without the continuing support of a body such as the Learning Skills Council in championing the cause of Arts training for disabled students, at the same time taking into account ways in which training can be provided most effectively for the range of disability and the skills available to support it. In the words of one representative for the university: *'it would be very easy for...the heat to be turned down a little bit after this, to carry on simmering away very safely on the back burner, and I really hope that senior staff at LSC, DfES, policy makers, aren't going to let that happen – that there will be continuing development of commitment to inclusion, particularly within training institutions...'* (member of staff, London Metropolitan University). Evidence from the projects makes clear that commitment to inclusion on the 'rights' side of the equation will need to be more closely matched by development of support skills among D&DA (and other training institutions) to facilitate effective delivery of training for the disabled.

### **5.3 Schools: a cautious approach**

Appreciation of this need for support skills, also adjustments to teaching approaches, can account at least in part for schools' cautious approach. Issues of access relate on an institutional level to physical access, but also include attitudinal ethos organisation wide; clearly, too, accessibility is crucial at the level of course development and delivery.

A member of staff at Mind the Gap, saw in the short term, little evidence that schools were of the mindset, as yet, to engage in a *proactive* way with the concept of bringing more talented disabled people into training: *'they're reacting to our offer rather than coming to us going 'look, we could do this and we could do that''*. Indeed, he felt that it would be difficult to ignite such a proactive approach from schools, because of the imperative for them to survive in a tough world. This is a key challenge also for primary and secondary schools where the inclusion agenda is more advanced. They too must balance the development of inclusion with the need to gain a high standing in league tables. Moreover, improved access to training could be inhibited by the demands and structures of the courses available (it is relevant to repeat here Graeae's suggestion that the regulating bodies be flexible about accommodating disabled students and that validating bodies provide advice to schools about how flexibility can be applied to a programme's modules).

### **5.4 Training effectively**

As regards the effectiveness of training in meeting the needs of particular students, the experience of observing very different approaches to teaching enabled tutors both at the companies and at the schools to consider new ideas that they could bring to their future engagement with (all) students. At an institutional level, a member of staff at Mind the Gap reported that the company had not been used to asking its students to learn set dance pieces in quite the same way as was required by school tutors. The theatre company's approach entails formalising from the content of a session, starting from the group's ideas and the form arising from this, while the school approach typically inverted this process, starting with an already developed form, choreographic ideas that were already clearly defined, and allowing individual ideas to arise and develop out of this. Staff at Mind the Gap were considering how they could incorporate this approach into some of the company's own teaching. At individual level, the range of students' experience for all three programmes was very wide, and so too was the experience of non-disabled and disabled tutors in teaching those with a physical or learning disability.

Many examples of good practice were identified in the approaches to teaching used with the Staging Change and Missing Piece 4 programmes and with CandoCo's Foundation Course. While tutors overall felt confident in using exercises they would have used in mainstream teaching, adjusting material as necessary during a lesson, this assumed the presence of access workers, and was in the context of an overarching need to provide appropriate materials in advance (e.g. brailled or text encaptioned) to safeguard students' access to the curriculum.

The emphasis of one tutor for Graeae upon course development being led by disabled people seems particularly pertinent to the needs of a number of Missing Piece 4 students, and disabled students generally. It seems sensible, too, that a steering group set up to monitor programme planning and development should include people with a range of disabilities, with a view to influencing its delivery towards inclusiveness.

Notwithstanding ten years of prior expertise in the field of integrated dance practice, CandoCo's Foundation Course has brought about new levels of understanding of teaching

and learning strategies that are dance specific, and the Foundation Course can still be described as unique. The Foundation Course has generated considerable interest and excitement in the contemporary and independent dance sectors about this new learning and there have been numerous requests from both FE and HE institutions to observe, analyse and record these developments. The course provides a matrix for research and development at post-graduate level and there is increasing interest in this externally. High expectations of an impact from the Foundation Course were expressed by the director of dance for Arts Council England: *'I am thrilled that CandoCo has had the opportunity to establish this milestone Foundation Course. The Company is a world leader in integrated dance, and the expertise they have gained is now available to this next generation of students. It marks a major step forward for the dance profession and will have reverberations for dance culture as a whole'*.

## 5.5 Market needs

The Mind The Gap interviewee spoke of the *'conservative tow'* discernible in the industry which is about minimising risk, looking for actors of a particular type, who can work in a particular way. From this viewpoint the need is for students and aspirant performers who can go into that market place. He drew a distinction here with the HE process which he felt to be more progressive, looking forward to perhaps ten years ahead. Nevertheless, he perceived positive signs of change, particularly from the world of film and television, where the company had experience of a demand for learning disabled actors. He suggested the need for a more proactive approach to agency, so that the market can easily identify and locate actors with a disability.

On a positive note, an interviewee from Mind the Gap noted the growing interest of regional and small to mid-scale venues in the potential of disability related work. This is not to say, however, that these venues place lesser emphasis upon training: on the contrary, in common with other potential employers, they place an emphasis on the highest quality of work available within their means, a quality which in turn is dependent largely upon access to quality training.

It is pertinent to note that all three, essentially performance, companies see as ideal the situation where disabled actors and dancers have access to training within training institutions at the level they need - the same access to training as any non-disabled student - enabling the companies to withdraw their training role. That this goal is still some years distant is evident from the views expressed in the course of this evaluation

The three projects have indeed given all their students quality training experiences of a wider range than previously available to them, although, as has been noted, these experiences have not been of sufficient duration to bear comparison with training on offer at the D&DA schools. For one tutor the legacy from Missing Piece (and this is also applicable to the other two programmes) could be seen in terms of giving disabled actors access to technique training, as distinct from talent training, for the latter can not be taught either to disabled or mainstream students. Technique training can give students *'a leg up into possibly thinking about going into drama school, or into the industry'* (tutor for Missing Piece 4) for it will increase the pool of disabled actors available, and castable, for example in BBC dramas. The radio and television work provided some Missing Piece 4 and Staging Change students with a basis for (further) employment possibilities, and the integrated workshops were offered to Missing Piece 4 students as experience for possible future employment. Conversely, the participation on Staging Change of three actors previously unknown to Mind the Gap increased the pool of actors from whom the company could in future select for professional tour work. Mind the Gap staff spoke of the company's unpreparedness, having worked for many years in a subsidized sector, for the necessarily market driven focus of the schools. This had in turn brought into focus the company's own recruitment policies, which

would in future address more closely the question : *'How do you make this sustainable, is there a real career there to develop?'* (member of staff, Mind the Gap).

### **5.6 Progression towards inclusion**

The programmes have produced examples of various degrees of integration with mainstream students. These limited forays have proved successful, in the eyes of the schools, the companies and not least, both project and mainstream students. It was pointed out that when non-disabled students have the opportunity of studying alongside those with a disability, they are likely to carry forward positive views of the experience, which may impact upon their later decisions as writers and casting directors. Though in some cases the programmes introduced integrated rather than wholly inclusive learning experiences, it seems likely that their favourable reception will be the basis for further initiatives. For Missing Piece, an interviewee observed that an element of progress towards inclusion is about embedding the course within the mainstream so that it is owned by an academic department rather than by a unit which specialises in widening participation.

However, many interviewees in all roles have indicated that the pace of change will be slow, to foster confidence among staff (and students) unused to an inclusive learning context, also to enable them to learn from successes, and mistakes, along the way. As expressed by a tutor from Arts Ed. the success of programmes and other initiatives will be *'measured by their ability to make a difference, make a change through individual's increased confidence and through the creation of partnerships'* (Arts Ed. tutor).

The slow pace of achievement applied too to the brokering of ultimately very rewarding partnerships between the companies and provider schools. Each side needed first to develop an understanding of and negotiate around the other's priorities, preferences and limitations, for ideal areas of potential co-operation were not always immediately clear, and the synchronising of timetables proved to be a complex matter. On a practical note, too, timely communication was essential to the smooth running of programmes and to comfort levels all round. Staff at Mind the Gap described the company's early experiences in relation to building a coherent programme as *'a series of near vertical launches'*, bearing in mind the frustrations of dealing with four other organisations, and coping with the organisations', as well as the company's own and the five students', time commitments and expectations. Many of those involved with the organisation and planning of all three programmes, on both sides of partner relationships, are likely to find in this appraisal echoes of their own experience at some stage of the project's life; clearly programme requirements sometimes called for tutors from the partner schools to be available at times when there were other heavy demands on staffing levels. However, the experience has proved positive in enabling each side of the partner relationship to understand the other's pressures and priorities, and enabling companies (specifically Mind the Gap) to understand more about the schools' market.

In the context of the D&DA, the flexible programmes have been pilot projects and have provided evidence that progress can best be made by working with the dance and drama schools in ways which are consistent with their strengths. As pilots the comfort levels of staff in terms of delivering training for people with learning and physical disabilities have been a priority. Progress will take time, but for now the programmes have made some important steps in working into the psyche of all in the industry.

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations draw on the evidence presented in previous sections. To begin, we draw attention to:

- *The lack of a clear definition of long term goals for disability projects of which these three are an example*
- *Insecurities regarding the status of ongoing funding*
- *Underdevelopment of support skills among D&DA (and other training institutions) for effective delivery of training for the disabled*
- *The 'conservative tow' linked with a mindset among D&DA schools generally which does not yet engage proactively with the concept of bringing more talented disabled people into training*
- *The imperative for D&DA schools to balance arguments for inclusion with the need to maintain standards*

Overall, evidence from the projects highlights their status as pilot initiatives and the continuing commitment at policy level needed to maintain interest in the disability training generated at school level, and where necessary to promote disability training from the back to the front burner of interest, and activity. At the same time, the majority view of respondents from schools, companies, and not least the students, is that integration should not be hastened in a way which jeopardises the comfort levels of those involved.

- ***Recommendation 1: At policy level, to continue to champion the cause of disability training while working with dance and drama schools in ways which are consistent with their strengths towards clearer definition of the goals for disability projects***

Uncertainties surrounding the future of the projects following their pilot year gave rise to difficulties for the companies in planning ahead both conceptually and in practical terms. It may be that for future projects joint school/company applications for funding are preferred, based on an existing (if nascent) relationship

- ***Recommendation 2: At policy level, support for a secure funding base alongside ongoing monitoring of continuation projects***

As is the case with mainstream students, post course student progression is clearly of concern as a basis for the continued funding of these, and similarly focused projects. Evidence from these projects suggests that for many (though not all) students their criteria for satisfactory progression are that they emerge as more experienced performers who are able to offer more skills in the work contexts that are already familiar to them. Other students may wish to undertake further training.

- ***Recommendation 3: That Trinity be asked to develop a foundation qualification for flexible provision that has clear progression into the Trinity Diplomas; and be asked to look at building flexibility and personalised learning routes through the Trinity qualifications for students who progress to a place with the D&DA providers***

Many interviewees have pointed to a lack of experience among D&DA school tutors in teaching students with a disability. There was evidence of apprehension concerning unknown difficulties which might await the inexperienced tutor, but this is but one factor underlying the reluctance of schools to engage proactively in bringing more disabled people

into training (evidenced by the response of just two schools to companies' offer of INSET). Inexperience and apprehension run alongside and tend to give strength to fears that support for inclusion runs counter to the imperative to maintain standards.

- ***Recommendation 4: That consideration be given to a course regulation framework which is sufficiently flexible to accommodate alternative and disability friendly media for presentation of work***

and that the standard of work should be safeguarded by:

- ***Recommendation 5: That validating bodies provide a service to schools which can offer case-specific advice on ways in which a programme's training can be made accessible within course regulations.***