



criticalpath

Impact Study April 2011 Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The impact study was commissioned by the board of Critical Path as part of its planning process for the operational period 2012-14. Founded in 2005, Critical Path is the only organisation in Australia dedicated to research into dance practice. The study was undertaken in order to assess the impact of its program and the extent to which it is achieving its ambition to become an internationally recognised centre for choreographic research. The study was conducted in Sydney and Melbourne between 7 March and 2 April 2011 and has drawn on the contributions of 390 individuals.
2. Critical Path's large, double height studio in a former naval drill hall on Sydney Harbour is a valuable asset to the arts community and a key component of the city's dance infrastructure. Its three-stranded program is widely recognised as distinctive and its focus on dance research considered unique in Australia. Between 2006 and 2010 Critical Path undertook 217 projects, workshops and events involving 1,401 participations by artists. 151 individual artists have taken part in Critical Path programs, 41% of them more than once.
3. Critical Path has generated funds which have supported professional research, aided the development of new work and created employment. Between 2006 and 2010 its program attracted \$1.8m in subsidy from Arts NSW and the Australia Council, meaning that public subsidy per project was \$8,300 and per participation by an artist \$1,300. The average investment in each individual artist who has participated in a Critical Path project is therefore \$12,000.
5. The organisation has initiated, or participated in, more than 35 regional, national and international partnerships across the arts sector and beyond it. Funds raised by Critical Path from non-arts sources and in earned income have brought an additional \$327,000 into the dance sector, representing a further investment of more than \$2,000 per participation by an artist. The organisation is recognised by its partners as an important cross-cultural interlocutor and a gateway both to the dance sector in NSW and to an extensive international network. While it is highly active in the interstate and international arenas, awareness of this aspect of its work in this area is under-recognised and insufficiently understood within among its NSW constituents.
6. No formal mechanism exists to track the development of ideas and practices that are researched in its program, but artists contributing to the study indicate that it has been a key contributor to the development of new productions which, in turn, have fed venue and festival programs nationally and internationally. State and federal funders indicate that applications for projects which have emerged from a period of research at Critical Path are stronger in presentation and content and therefore considered more favourably. Available data – although incomplete – indicates an increased allocation of federal funding to NSW artists since 2006.

7. Contributing artists offer evidence that the program has been instrumental in developing individual and collective artistic practice, describing Critical Path's program as a unique ideological space within which profound personal and professional transformations have been experienced. They indicate that it has provided an important social and intellectual space for artists, that it has stimulated discussion and collaboration among them and that it has fostered cohesion within the dance sector.
8. A strong sense of sector engagement with the organisation is evidenced by the high volume of survey respondents who had not participated in a program and by consistent rates of application to it. Study contributors emphasised a stakeholder relationship: a sense of pride in, and ownership of, the organisation. Study data counters the perception that access to the program is constrained to a small group of artists who have had repeated opportunities and, similarly, that participation is limited to older female artists. The spread of activity evidenced indicates that perceptions of a technology-dominant program are inexact.
9. Critical Path's focus on research represents a distinctive proposition in the Australian dance landscape and the program is admired by interstate artists and presenters. While this singularity of emphasis underlines the absence of a 'next stage' process in the sector there is evidence that it has mobilised Sydney venues to design and implement new pathways to production. While the majority of survey respondents identified a need for more creative development opportunities in the state, few advocated that Critical Path change its focus to meet this need, or expressed a belief that it was its responsibility to do so.
10. The organisation's achievements are significant and it is held in high regard in the arts community. However, recognition and depth of understanding of the breadth of its work and of the transformative impact of its program is limited to niche groups and to individuals. There is an opportunity for the organisation to address its evaluation and communication strategies and to amplify its messages. There are many good stories, but many remain untold.