

Blues Teacher training at Bluesology

Evaluation & Impact Report

2025



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Introduction

From Training to Practice: Building Blues Dance Capacity in Northern Ireland

This report documents the outcomes of *Bluesology Teacher Training*, a professional development project undertaken by **Carrie Montgomery and Declan Allison**, supported by the **Arts Council of Northern Ireland** through the *Support for Individual Artists Programme (SIAP)*.

Carrie and Declan are the only dedicated blues dance teachers currently working in Northern Ireland. Over the past six years, they have developed a growing blues dance community through weekly classes, workshops and social dances, public performances, and close connections with Northern Ireland's live blues music scene. Their work has helped introduce blues dance as a participatory artform within a region where social dancing remains underdeveloped compared to other parts of the UK and Europe.

While this practice has grown organically and intuitively, both artists recognised a need to **strengthen their teaching practice through formal, blues-specific pedagogical training**.

Bluesology Teacher Training, delivered by **The Blues Room** in Valencia and led by co-founders **Vicci Moore and Adamo Ciarallo**, provided a unique opportunity to address this gap. As Europe's only dedicated blues dance teacher training programme, Bluesology combines pedagogy, andragogy, cultural context and practical teaching application, while explicitly honouring the values and heritage of blues dance.

The project was designed in two phases. The first involved participation in the Bluesology Teacher Training in Valencia. The second focused on applying this learning through the redesign, delivery and evaluation of a revised blues dance syllabus in Northern Ireland.

This report brings together **quantitative and qualitative evaluation data** from participants, alongside reflective practice by the artists, to examine how the training influenced teaching quality, student experience, artistic development and professional trajectory. It is shared openly in the spirit of knowledge-sharing and sector development, and with gratitude to the international community that made this learning possible.

BLUESOLOGY TEACHER TRAINING

Learning, Pedagogy and International Exchange

The Bluesology Teacher Training, delivered by *The Blues Room* in Valencia and led by **Vicci Moore and Adamo Ciarallo**, is Europe's only dedicated teacher training programme focused specifically on blues dance.

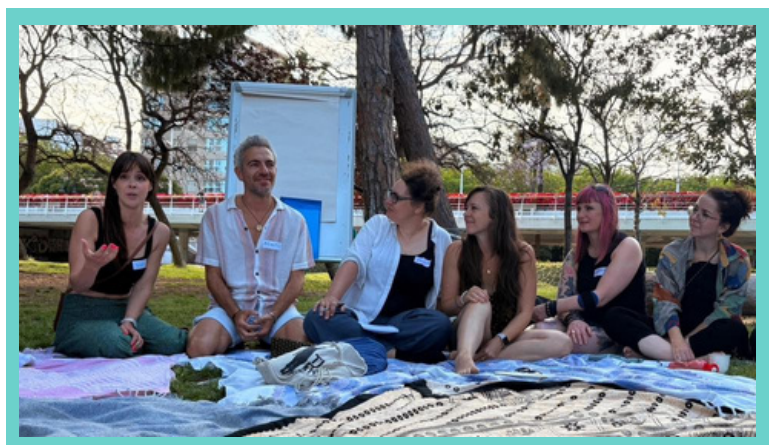
The training took place over **eight intensive days** and combined pedagogical theory, cultural context and hands-on teaching practice. The programme is designed for dancers who are already teaching, or preparing to teach, and places equal emphasis on *how* we teach and *why* we teach.

Key areas of learning included:

- defining learning aims and outcomes;
- structuring individual classes and multi-week courses;
- analysing and breaking down movement;
- musical interpretation and connection;
- communication and presentation skills;
- inclusive teaching and group management;
- assessment, feedback and reflective practice;
- honouring the cultural and historical foundations of blues dance.

A defining feature of Bluesology is its emphasis on **community and peer learning**. The programme brought together thirty-six blues teachers and organisers from across Europe, creating a shared space for reflection, challenge and mutual support. Through group discussion, teaching practice and informal exchange, the training fostered an international network of practitioners committed to thoughtful, values-led blues dance education.

For us, Bluesology represented a shift from intuitive, experience-based teaching towards a **reflective, intentional and evidence-based pedagogical approach**, while remaining grounded in the joy, improvisation and social connection at the heart of blues dance.



APPLYING THE LEARNING IN BELFAST

From Training to Teaching Practice

Following the **Bluesology Teacher Training** in Valencia, we returned to Belfast and undertook a four-month period of reflective practice, curriculum redesign and delivery. The aim of this phase was to embed the learning from Bluesology directly into our regular blues dance classes, ensuring the training translated into meaningful change for participants.

We began by critically reviewing our existing syllabus and teaching approach. Drawing on the pedagogical frameworks explored at Bluesology, we clarified learning aims and outcomes, restructured class flow, and refined how we introduce, develop and reinforce key concepts across a term. Particular attention was given to pacing, progression and the balance between explanation, demonstration and embodied practice.

Key changes introduced included:

- clearer structure and sequencing within each class;
- more explicit learning outcomes for individual sessions and themes;
- refined breakdown of movement to support different learning styles;

- increased focus on grounding, posture and body awareness;
- deeper integration of musicality and connection throughout the class;
- more intentional use of feedback and in-the-moment teaching intervention.

Alongside delivery, we committed to **ongoing reflection and evaluation**, using observation, discussion and participant feedback to assess how the revised approach was landing in practice. This allowed us to respond to learners in real time while also gathering evidence of impact over the term.

This phase marked a shift from intuitive teaching towards a **more intentional, learner-centred and evidence-informed practice**, while preserving the improvisation, playfulness and social connection that sit at the heart of blues dance.



EVALUATION APPROACH

How We Measured Change and Impact

As outlined in our original project proposal, evaluation was embedded into the delivery of the revised blues dance syllabus. The purpose of this evaluation was to understand whether the learning from **Bluesology Teacher Training** resulted in meaningful improvements to teaching quality, participant experience, and artistic practice.

We used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, alongside reflective practice by the artists. This ensured that both measurable change and lived experience were captured.

Evaluation Methods

Our evaluation included:

- a structured anonymous participant questionnaire, issued at the end of the term;
- quantitative questions comparing the revised teaching approach with previous terms (where applicable);
- open-ended qualitative questions inviting reflection on learning, confidence, accessibility and experience;
- artist reflection informed by observation and ongoing dialogue with participants.

The questionnaire was designed to be accessible and inclusive, allowing participants to respond based on their own experience and learning style.

Evaluation Framework

The findings are structured using **Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Programme Evaluation**, a widely used model for assessing learning and development outcomes:

Reaction – how participants experienced the classes and learning environment

- **Learning** – changes in skills, understanding and awareness
- **Behaviour** – application of learning, confidence and embodied change
- **Impact** – wider artistic, social and professional outcomes

This framework allowed us to assess not only whether participants enjoyed the classes, but whether the revised teaching approach led to deeper learning, behavioural change and longer-term impact.

Why This Matters

Many participants attending our classes are returning to dance later in life, and a significant proportion identify as disabled, neurodivergent or living with mental health conditions. A clear, reflective and participant-centred evaluation approach was therefore essential in understanding how changes to teaching practice affected accessibility, confidence and inclusion.

The pages that follow present the findings of this evaluation, beginning with an overview of who took part.

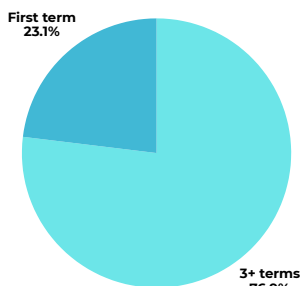
WHO TOOK PART?

Participant Profile and Reach

This evaluation reflects feedback from participants attending our regular blues dance classes following the implementation of the revised syllabus.

The participant profile **highlights a highly engaged, diverse and geographically dispersed community**, providing a strong basis for evaluating change over time.

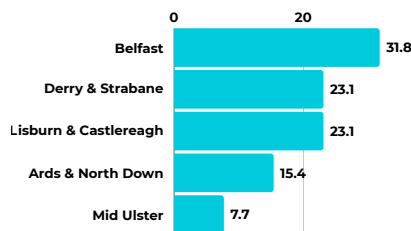
Participant Experience



This indicates that the majority of respondents were well placed to compare the revised teaching approach with previous terms.

Geographic Reach Across Northern Ireland





Although classes are delivered in Belfast, participants travelled from across Northern Ireland:



This demonstrates both the demand for blues dance training and the willingness of participants to travel for high-quality, specialist provision.

Inclusive Participation

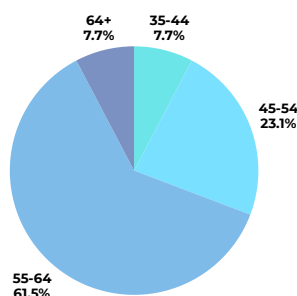
Respondents identified across a range of lived experiences:

-  **Disabled** – 30.8%
-  **Neurodivergent** – 23.1%
-  **Mental health issues** – 23.1%
-  **LGBTQIA+** – 15.4%
- Prefer not to say – 7.7%
- None of the above – 53.8%

This reinforces the importance of creating a welcoming, accessible and psychologically safe learning environment, and provides vital context for interpreting the evaluation findings that follow.

Age Profile

Participants represented a broad adult age range, with particularly strong engagement from older adults:



This profile reinforces the importance of clear structure, pacing and inclusive teaching approaches when working with adult learners returning to movement later in life.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE & SATISFACTION

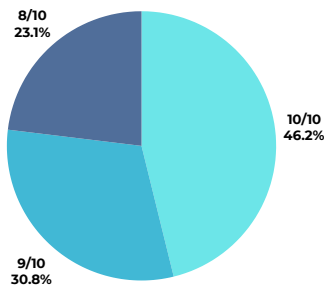
How Participants Experienced the Classes

(Kirkpatrick Level 1: Reaction)

This section explores how participants experienced the revised blues dance classes following the implementation of learning from **Bluesology Teacher Training**. It focuses on overall satisfaction, sense of support, and the learning environment created through the updated teaching approach.

Overall Experience

Participants reported exceptionally high levels of satisfaction:



100% of respondents said they would recommend the classes to a friend.

These ratings suggest a strong positive response to the revised syllabus and teaching style, particularly given that over three-quarters of respondents had attended multiple previous terms and were able to compare experiences.

Sense of Community

Participants repeatedly referenced the social and emotional benefits of attending:

- connection with like-minded people;
- a sense of calm and stress relief;
- enjoyment of music and shared movement;
- feeling part of a supportive community.

"The feeling of calmness it gives me when I'm dancing and listening to the wonderful music."

"Great music, dancing and community."

What Helped Participants Feel Comfortable and Supported?

Participants consistently highlighted the learning environment and teaching approach as key factors in feeling supported:

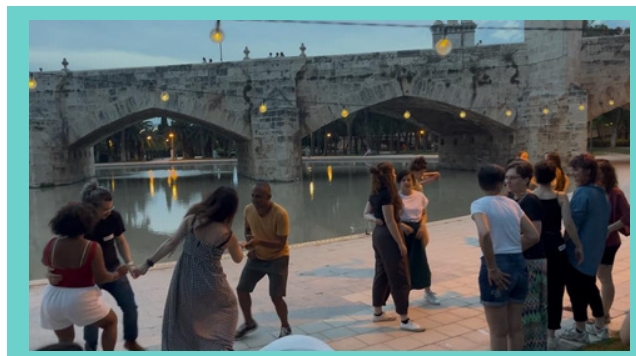
- a warm, welcoming atmosphere;
- respectful responses to questions;
- positive, sensitive individual feedback;
- a strong sense of inclusion and belonging.

"All questions are treated respectfully and individual feedback is given in a positive and sensitive manner."

"Everybody is made welcome and included."

"The class has always felt like a very neutral environment for all."

This feedback is particularly significant given the number of participants identifying as disabled, neurodivergent, or living with long-term mental health conditions.



LEARNING OUTCOMES & TEACHING QUALITY

What Participants Learned and Noticed

(Kirkpatrick Level 2: Learning)

This section explores changes in learning, understanding and teaching quality following the implementation of the revised syllabus informed by **Bluesology Teacher Training**. Participants were asked to compare their experience of this term with previous classes where applicable.

Improvements Compared to Previous Terms

Participants reported clear improvements across key aspects of teaching:

Structure and flow of classes

- 77% rated this as better or much better

Clarity of explanations and demonstrations

- 61% rated this as better or much better

Musicality and connection in the teaching

- 69% rated this as better or much better

Inspiration and motivation to dance

- 76.5% rated this as better or much better

These results indicate that changes made to class design, pacing and pedagogical approach translated into noticeable improvements for learners.

Teaching Methods That Stood Out

Participants noted the effectiveness of:

- targeted technical explanations;
- embodied exercises to support connection and awareness;
- themed learning that linked technique to musical interpretation;
- interactive teaching interventions during practice.

These responses suggest that learning was not only understood cognitively, but also embodied and applied through movement.

What Participants Said They Learned

Qualitative feedback highlighted learning gains closely aligned with the focus of Bluesology training, including:

- improved grounding, posture and body awareness;
- clearer understanding of movement fundamentals;
- increased awareness of physiology and injury prevention;
- deeper engagement with musicality and connection;
- greater confidence in close embrace and partner work.

"The teaching on grounding and good connection is so important and is clearly making our dancing better."

"Clarification of some physiological aspects has been very helpful."

"Really good body awareness to prevent injuries."



CONFIDENCE, BEHAVIOUR & APPLICATION

How Learning Showed Up in Practice

(Kirkpatrick Level 3: Behaviour)

This section explores how the learning and improvements identified in the previous page translated into changes in participants' confidence, focus and ability to apply skills in practice.

Changes in Confidence and Ability

Participants reported clear shifts in how they experienced themselves as dancers during this term. Responses highlighted:

- increased confidence in blues dance technique and close embrace;
- greater ease and relaxation while dancing;
- improved concentration and focus;
- clearer understanding applied directly in partner dancing and social contexts.

"Yes, feel much more relaxed."

"Better concentration and focus."

"It has helped clear up some past confusion."

"Better understanding of close embrace."

These responses suggest that the revised teaching approach supported not only technical learning, but also emotional safety and self-trust in movement.

Reflective Feedback and Refinement

One participant offered detailed constructive feedback relating to:

- the length of explanations and demonstrations;
- partner rotation timing and opportunities for practice.

This feedback has been welcomed as part of an ongoing reflective process and will inform future refinement of class pacing and structure. Importantly, it was framed alongside strong affirmation of teaching quality, knowledge and professionalism.

"These comments in no way detract from the fact that the level of tuition... is second to none."

Application of Learning

Participants described how learning was applied through:

- improved leading and following;
- greater awareness of core movement before direction;
- more confident engagement with musical interpretation;
- increased comfort with physical interaction and connection.

"How important core and movement before direction is to dance."

"Yes to both and I think mainly down to interjection and physical interaction by teachers."

This indicates that teaching interventions, feedback and embodied exercises helped bridge the gap between explanation and lived practice.



WIDER IMPACT & PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES

Lasting Effects Beyond the Studio

(Kirkpatrick Level 4: Impact)

This section explores the wider artistic, social and professional impact of the project, considering outcomes for participants, the artists, and the broader blues dance ecosystem in Northern Ireland.

Impact on Participants' Lives

Participants described impacts that extended beyond technical skill development, particularly in relation to wellbeing, confidence and social connection.

Feedback highlighted:

- improved mental wellbeing and stress reduction;
- increased confidence following personal challenges or loss;
- meaningful social connection and friendship formation;
- a sense of belonging within a safe and welcoming community.

"My outlook on my life has significantly improved and the challenges of learning the various dances has helped me find my confidence again following a significant loss in my life."

"The opportunity to de-stress in my own safe space."

"I have made a number of very good friends from participating in the classes."

Participants also reported confidence to dance in public and unfamiliar settings, something many had never imagined themselves doing previously.



Contribution to an Inclusive Dance Ecology

The participant profile demonstrates that the revised teaching approach successfully supported:

- older adults returning to movement later in life;
- disabled and neurodivergent participants;
- individuals living with mental health conditions.

The clarity, pacing and inclusive ethos strengthened through Bluesology training contributed to a learning environment where participants felt respected, supported and able to engage at their own pace.

Professional Impact for the Artists

At a professional level, the project resulted in a significant step-change in artistic practice and career trajectory.

Key outcomes included:

- strengthened teaching confidence and credibility;
- a shift towards reflective, evidence-based pedagogy;
- integration of international best practice into local delivery;
- development of an international professional network of blues teachers.

As a direct result of connections formed through Bluesology Teacher Training, we have since been invited to deliver blues dance workshops in Europe, marking an important step in raising the international profile of blues dance practice emerging from Northern Ireland.

CONCLUSION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Reflection, Gratitude and What Comes Next

This evaluation demonstrates that participation in **Bluesology Teacher Training** enabled a meaningful shift in our teaching practice - from an intuitive, experience-led approach to a more **reflective, intentional and evidence-informed pedagogy**. The changes introduced following the training resulted in measurable improvements in teaching quality, participant experience, confidence and inclusion, while preserving the joy, improvisation and human connection at the heart of blues dance.

Beyond the classroom, the project strengthened our professional confidence and artistic direction, embedded international best practice within local delivery, and contributed to the ongoing development of blues dance as a participatory artform in Northern Ireland. The international connections formed through Bluesology, including invitations to teach in Europe, mark an important step in raising the profile of blues dance practice emerging from this region.

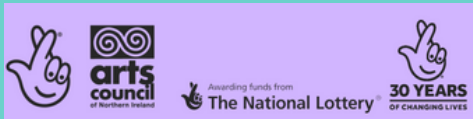
We are deeply grateful to the many people and organisations who supported this journey.



With thanks to:

Vicci Moore and Adamo Ciarallo, and *The Blues Room*, for creating and delivering the Bluesology Teacher Training with such care, rigour and integrity, and for fostering a generous international community of blues teachers committed to values-led practice.

Arts Council of Northern Ireland, for supporting this professional development through the **Support for Individual Artists Programme (SIAP)**, enabling learning that has translated directly into artistic and community impact.



Our Social Space, for providing an inclusive, supportive home for this work in Northern Ireland, and for championing social dance as a tool for connection, wellbeing and belonging.

The Blues Crew, whose ongoing volunteer support, encouragement and commitment help sustain our classes, socials and wider blues dance community, making this work possible week after week.

Finally, we thank all our **students and participants**, whose openness, feedback and willingness to learn made this evaluation meaningful and whose voices sit at the heart of this report.

Looking Ahead

We look forward to continuing to build on this learning, staying connected to the Bluesology community, and contributing to the growth of blues dance locally and internationally - with care, curiosity and collaboration.