

Position Paper

The Imperative for Regulating the Dance Industry in Australia

Dance Arts Alliance | May 2025

Introduction

The dance industry in Australia plays a pivotal role in the cultural and artistic development of many children. However, the absence of comprehensive national regulation exposes young dancers to potential risks, including physical injury and abuse. While some states have implemented child safe standards, the lack of uniformity and enforcement mechanisms leaves significant gaps in safeguarding children.

This paper advocates for the establishment of a national regulatory framework to ensure the safety and well-being of all children engaged in dance activities across Australia.

Current Landscape

Presently, Australia's approach to child safety in dance is fragmented. National guidelines exist, but only a few states have enacted mandatory child safe standards. In these states, bodies like the Commission for Children and Young People are tasked with oversight but often lack the necessary resources to effectively monitor the approximately 4,000 dance studios nationwide. This disparity results in inconsistent safety measures and leaves many children and young people vulnerable.

Case Studies of Regulatory Bodies in Similar Sectors

Examining other sectors reveals effective models of regulation that could be adapted for the dance industry:

Swimming Australia

Swimming Australia has adopted the National Integrity Framework (NIF), which includes comprehensive policies to ensure a safe, fair, and inclusive environment for all participants. The NIF includes:

- A Child Safeguarding Policy, outlining mandatory safety requirements
- A Member Protection Policy, enforcing standards of behaviour
- Clear guidelines for handling complaints and disputes

These policies mandate adherence to specific behavioural standards and reporting obligations, strengthening child safety in the sport.

Gymnastics Australia

Following concerns over athlete welfare, Gymnastics Australia implemented the Safer Sport Framework, which includes:

- A Child Safe Policy to protect young athletes
- A Member Protection Policy that enforces ethical teaching standards
- Mandatory education programs for coaches, staff, and athletes to prevent abuse

These measures have significantly improved safety, accountability, and professional conduct within the gymnastics industry.

Australian Cheer Sport Guidelines

The Australian Cheer Sport Alliance (ACSA) has developed a formal framework for safety and ethical conduct in cheerleading, a similarly unregulated, youth-focused movement discipline. Their model includes:

- A Child Protection Policy aligned with national child safe standards
- Coach accreditation programs and minimum credentialing for tumbling and stunting
- Clear competition safety rules and risk mitigation measures

While ACSA is a self-regulated body, its efforts demonstrate how grassroots industries can proactively implement standards that protect young participants and support coaches, without compromising the culture or creativity of the activity.

Performing Arts Sector (Music and Drama)

While the performing arts sector (e.g. AMEB, school-based drama programs, and youth theatre companies) doesn't operate under a single national framework, some organisations have embedded:

- Codes of Conduct for tutors
- Mandatory Working with Children Checks
- Rehearsal safety protocols (particularly in schools and funded companies)

These examples reinforce that safety and inclusivity can be embedded even in sectors with diverse, decentralised practice models. However, unlike dance, these sectors are often tied to school systems or funded institutions, which brings more inherent oversight.

The Case for Regulation

The absence of a standardised regulatory framework in the dance industry presents several risks:

1. Child Safety

Without consistent regulations, studios may lack adequate child protection policies, increasing the risk of abuse and neglect. The sector has identified the need for stronger protections, especially for students without support networks. Key concerns include:

- Inappropriate behaviour during tours and outside studio hours
- Unregulated social media contact between teachers and students
- Lack of clear reporting pathways or fear of legal consequences

Support is strong for anonymous reporting systems and robust guidelines for identifying and managing inappropriate conduct.

2. Injury Prevention

Unregulated teaching practices can lead to physical injuries among young dancers due to improper techniques or unsafe environments. Key issues include:

- Unqualified “dance coaches” promoting unsafe techniques
- Absence of consistent standards for physical training, warm-up, and progression

3. Professional Standards

A lack of regulation allows for inconsistent teacher qualifications and studio operations, potentially compromising the quality of dance education. Challenges identified include:

- Unclear professional benchmarks
- Inability to differentiate experienced professionals from unqualified operators
- The need to recognise custom curriculums and diverse teaching methods

Requests have been made for:

- Clear compliance checklists
- Guidance on studio safety standards and teacher-to-student ratios
- A regulatory model that values and reflects the broad diversity of dance genres

Recommendations

To address these concerns, the following actions are recommended:

1. Establish a National Regulatory Body

A dedicated, independent authority should be created to:

- Set and enforce child safety and professional standards
 - Manage accreditation, auditing, and complaints
 - Operate transparently and independently of commercial or high-profile interests
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2. Implement Mandatory Accreditation

All dance studios and instructors should be required to obtain accreditation based on adherence to clear safety and professional guidelines, including:

- Child safety policies and procedures
- Minimum training or recognised experience
- Ethical teaching standards

Accreditation must be:

- Affordable and accessible
- Scalable to accommodate different business sizes and regional realities

3. Regular Audits and Inspections

Routine audits of dance studios should be conducted to ensure compliance with safety protocols. Non-compliance should carry fair, transparent consequences.

4. Comprehensive Training Programs

Develop and offer training for dance educators and studio operators, covering:

- Child protection and identifying harm
- Injury prevention and safe dance practice
- Ethical teaching behaviour and communication
- Recognition pathways for experienced but unaccredited teachers, including micro-credentialing options

5. Community Awareness Campaigns

Public campaigns should be launched to educate parents and guardians about:

- The importance of choosing accredited dance studios
 - What to look for in a safe, professional environment
 - How to report concerns safely and confidently
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Education and Support for Studios

Support for regulation must be accompanied by sector-wide resources. Dance Arts Alliance will lead efforts to:

- Deliver training and professional development workshops
 - Provide templates and policy kits
 - Assist with transition to compliance, especially for long-standing teachers
 - Offer resources for students and teachers experiencing or witnessing misconduct
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Implementation and Transparency

A national regulatory framework should be implemented in stages to ensure fairness and capacity-building:

Phase 1: Co-Design and Consultation (2025–2026)

- Engage studio owners, teachers, safety experts, and families
- Develop standards, tools, and pilot programs collaboratively

Phase 2: Pilot and Voluntary Participation (2026)

- Launch pilot accreditation and training programs
- Collect feedback and refine the framework based on real-world experience

Phase 3: National Roll-Out (2027 onwards)

- Mandate minimum standards and accreditation
 - Ensure continued support, monitoring, and public reporting
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The regulatory body must be built on transparency and fairness, with:

- Public reporting on operations and outcomes
 - Regular independent evaluation
 - Equitable access to support services for all studios
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Conclusion

This call for national regulation is not about imposing control, it's about lifting the standard of care, professionalism, and accountability across our industry so that every child, every teacher, and every studio is protected and empowered.

We are not aiming for overreach. We are aiming for balance, where safety, fairness, and sustainability work hand-in-hand with creative freedom, cultural diversity, and business viability.

Dance Arts Alliance sees its role not as an enforcer, but as a support partner and advocate as a bridge between government, studios, educators, and families. Our goal is to lead this change collaboratively: ensuring that regulation is not something done *to* the industry, but something shaped *by* it.

Through shared standards and clear pathways for compliance, we can safeguard the future of dance in Australia, a future where every studio, regardless of size, style, or location, can thrive in a trusted and unified system.

This is a defining moment for the dance sector. Together, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that dance remains not only an art form of expression, but one of safety, dignity, and excellence.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Regulating the Dance Industry in Australia

Dance Arts Alliance – May 2025

1. What does “regulating the dance industry” mean?

Regulation involves establishing and enforcing consistent standards across all dance studios and instructors in Australia. This includes rules and policies related to child safety, professional conduct, instructor qualifications, and studio environments. It would ensure that all studios operate within a nationally agreed framework and that there is independent oversight and accountability when something goes wrong.

2. Why is regulation necessary in dance?

Currently, there is no national framework to ensure that:

- Studios follow child safety best practices
- Teachers meet minimum qualifications or training standards
- Misconduct or unsafe practices are consistently addressed

Without regulation, studios vary widely in how they operate. While many uphold high standards, others do not—placing children and young people at risk. Regulation ensures that safety and professionalism are not optional, but guaranteed.

3. How will regulation improve child safety?

A regulatory framework will:

- **Standardise child protection protocols** including background checks, codes of conduct, and supervision requirements
 - **Mandate clear reporting and complaints processes**, including anonymous reporting options
 - **Extend protections to out-of-studio contexts**, such as tours, competitions, and online communications
 - **Hold educators and institutions accountable** for unsafe or unethical conduct
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4. How will this impact studio owners and teachers?

Studios and teachers will need to:

- Meet minimum child safety and professional standards
- Participate in accreditation and (where applicable) undergo audits
- Engage with compulsory training or recognition of prior learning pathways

Support from DAA will include:

- Free policy templates and compliance tools
 - Access to accredited training programs
 - Advocacy for funding to support implementation
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5. Will studios lose their independence or ability to teach in their own style?

No. The proposed regulatory model respects the **diversity of dance genres, methods, and cultural practices**. Regulation is not about curriculum control. It is about setting shared minimum standards around **safety, ethics, and professionalism**, while protecting creative freedom and studio identity.

6. What about teachers who are experienced but not formally qualified?

DAA recognises that many excellent teachers may lack formal qualifications but have years of experience. The regulatory framework will:

- Provide **recognition of prior learning (RPL)** pathways
 - Offer **micro-credentialing** for child safety, injury prevention, and ethics
 - Encourage continued professional development, not penalise legacy knowledge
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7. Will this make it harder or more expensive to run a studio?

Member feedback raised this concern. In response, DAA is advocating for:

- **Tiered accreditation options** that reflect studio size and scope
- **Government funding and subsidies** to reduce compliance costs
- **Low-cost or subsidised training** opportunities

The goal is an inclusive system that raises standards *without* disadvantaging small, regional, or community-based studios.

8. What kind of misconduct or risks would regulation help prevent?

Regulation will help prevent:

- Physical injuries due to poor technique or unsafe environments
- Emotional abuse, inappropriate relationships, or boundary violations
- Online misconduct and unsupervised interactions outside class
- Unqualified individuals presenting as dance educators

Clear codes of conduct, reporting mechanisms, and transparent enforcement will offer protection for students, families, and educators alike.

9. Who will oversee the regulation, and how will it be governed?

DAA recommends the creation of an **independent national regulatory body**, separate from any single business, elite institution, or personality-driven entity. It should:

- Include broad representation from across the dance sector
 - Publish annual reports and undergo regular audits
 - Be accountable to the community it serves
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10. What is the implementation plan?

DAA proposes a **phased rollout**:

Phase 1 (2025–2026):

Sector-wide consultation, co-design of standards, development of tools and training

Phase 2 (2026):

Pilot programs and voluntary participation, with feedback loops and sector evaluation

Phase 3 (2027 onwards):

Mandated accreditation and safety standards nationwide, supported by training, oversight, and continuous improvement

11. What can parents do to ensure a studio is safe?

Parents should:

- Ask whether the studio is accredited or compliant with child safety standards
- Review child protection policies and teacher qualifications
- Observe the class environment and teacher-student dynamics
- Encourage transparent communication and open-door policies

DAA will publish a **Parent Guide to Safe Dance Studios** in the coming months.

12. How can people get involved in supporting regulation?

You can:

- Provide feedback on this Position Paper
 - Share your experience or needs through our surveys and/or workshops
 - Join our advocacy initiatives
 - Stay connected by subscribing to DAA updates and professional development opportunities
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