

PRESS RELEASE – Basel, 17 March 2023

Findings independent investigation

The independent investigation into the allegations made in an article in the NZZ am Sonntag & Bajour of 23 October 2022 is closed.

The subject of the investigation was the criticism made in the said article concerning serious abuses, humiliation and lewd behaviour, as well as degrading communication, treatment affecting mental and physical health and the creation of a culture of fear towards female students in the professional training program (EFZ*). Specifically, the leadership and communication behaviour of the director of BTB as the person responsible for training in relation to female learners in BTB was investigated.

A total of 30 students provided information, 24 former and 6 current female students. The research period covers the past 10 years. About 57% of the statements refer to the time before 2017, 43% after 2017. 20% of the statements come from current learners. During this 10-year period, approximately 250 students were trained at BTB. Interviews were also conducted with individual former and current BTB employees, a BTB sports doctor and a dance expert. The research was conducted by BeTrieb, an external company specialised in this field. The resulting report was reviewed by another dance expert before it was finalised.

In summary, some allegations that were made have not been confirmed; however, others have. They are mainly directed against the director of the BTB. Certain allegations are directed against a teacher who was dismissed in 2015 and who has not taught at BTB since then. During the talks, no accusations were made against the teachers currently employed at BTB in the EFZ sector.

What has not been confirmed

Insofar as the NZZ am Sonntag & Bajour give the impression of an existing harassment problem, this is not the case, as allegations in this regard refer to a past that goes back years and to teachers who have not worked at the BTB for a long time. Nor has the investigation substantiated the accusation of insufficient caution or inadequate handling of physical complaints by trainees. Nor did it confirm that there was a problem of discrimination in role assignments, filming or stage performances.

What has been confirmed

The investigation has shown that the director of BTB did not sufficiently observe her duty of care. In concrete terms, this means that in the training of dancers in the EFZ sector, some of the female students interviewed were subjected to demeaning treatment. In addition, the investigation found that pressure was exerted on students with regard to weight reduction. It was also found that the director's behaviour intimidated some of the learners and created a climate of fear for them.

We apologise

"Dealing with this investigation finding is not an easy task," said Adrienne Develey, Co-President of the BTB Board. "We take note that not all allegations have been confirmed. On the other hand, we are saddened and deeply regret that some students suffered during their time at BTB. The Board sincerely apologises to these women. I am happy to be available for personal discussions with those affected. Perhaps this can be a contribution to help them come to terms with what they have experienced."

"I was not aware that I had behaved in a derogatory manner or exerted unwanted pressure on anyone. If anyone has suffered from my actions or speech I sincerely apologize. The voices of the young women in this report have been heard and have made me, and the dance community as a whole, realize how fragile individual students who aspire to be professional dancers can be. In my future work as a ballet teacher, I will consciously maintain a respectful and appreciative approach to students of all genders," says the director of BTB.

Reinstatement of the director under clear framework until closure of the professional school

In line with the reservations in the report concerning the reinstatement of the director, and following in-depth discussions with the director, the BTB Board has decided to reinstate the director's teaching duties. In addition to a disciplinary measure, teaching activities will take place under the following conditions:

- The director will do a coaching.
- The parents and pupils have given their consent to the teaching activity.
- The lesson will only take place in the presence of a second adult.
- Until the closure of the EFZ area at the end of this school year, it will be continued that two representatives per class can give direct feedback to the board.

The Board is convinced that it has found a suitable solution for the remaining time of the school until its closure at the end of this school year. "The future of the current students is our first priority," says the BTB board. "We are committed to providing our students with the best possible support for their graduation, or a follow-up solution at another school."

With the closure of the professional training area in July this year, BTB will focus on the hobby area and keep it going.

Note: This is a translation of the original German version of the press release which is accessible on the BTB website.

* Swiss Federal Certificate of Proficiency

The Ballet School of Theater Basel offers a wide range of high-quality training (modern and classical) for students who wish to pursue a professional dance career. In addition to dance training, students have the opportunity to complete academic training at the Huber Widemann School and obtain a Federal Certificate of Proficiency (EFZ) as a stage dancer.