



Royal Conservatoire  
of Scotland

# Health and Wellbeing Transitions support for Dancers

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**Transition(s) the practice supports:** The transition of BA Modern Ballet Students from pre-entry and through their programme of study to employment.

**Abstract:** This case study illustrates developments in the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's BA Modern Ballet programme to enhance the transitions support given to ballet students to promote health and wellbeing and to develop techniques and positive actions that helps to assure students' health, fitness and wellbeing throughout their programme of study and into employment.

**Description:** The promotion of both general health and wellbeing and dance-specific health and well-being was introduced three years ago to the BA Modern Ballet programme at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and is now a significant strand running through all three years of the Programme. The following illustrates how health and wellbeing transitions support has been developed from pre-entry, across all three years of the programme:-

**Pre-Entry.** Health and wellbeing awareness and promotion starts even before students arrive at the Conservatoire and is key to the transition into full-time study. All students applying for the programme are auditioned and the audition process includes individual physiotherapy screening. Each student has a screening with a physiotherapist prior to entering to the programme. The screening identifies areas for development and is used by the programme team to prepare bespoke advice and recommend a programme of preparatory strengthening exercises, where relevant, that a student entering the programme can do prior to commencing their studies.

**Induction during Transitions Week.** During the first week of the programme, all first year students meet with specialist staff attend sessions covering, safe dance practice, warming-up and cooling-down and nutrition for the dancer.

**First Year.** A special module, 'Core Skills' was introduced to the first year of the programme in 2011 as part of the Conservatoire's undergraduate curriculum reform.

The module runs throughout this first trimester and is designed to cover the main areas that students transitioning from school will need to deal with during their first few months of full-time dance training. In addition to continuing the safe dance practice and nutrition sessions started during transitions week, students also have a structured programme of Pilates, daily warm-up sessions and are introduced to anatomy for the dancer.

**Second Year.** During the second year of the programme, the health and wellbeing strand develops in four different ways. 1) Students are introduced to the **Gyrotonics** expansion system, which uses equipment designed around the human body to create spherical movement which articulates and mobilises the joints while strengthening the body's core musculature. The exercises are combined with synchronised breathing patterns which enhance aerobic and cardiovascular stimulation as well as increasing flexibility in the spine, releasing tension in the upper body and improving co-ordination through movement. 2) **Pilates classes** continue but advances from 'mat-based' work introduced in first year into more advanced lessons in the specialist Pilates studio, utilising Pilates equipment. 3) **Nutrition lectures** continue and deal with injury prevention and differing requirements for students at different periods in the year, for example during training, rest and break periods. 4) **Anatomy for the Dancer** develops and students complete an individual project as part of their programme of study.

**Year 3.** With the students approaching the end of their training, Health and Wellbeing becomes more individually focused. Individual Gyrotonics and Pilates programmes are developed that students can continue to practise when they graduate and enter employment. Nutrition lectures focus on the specific requirements for performance and touring. As part of the Professional Preparation module, students are required to produce an individually tailored Personal Development Plan, which will allow them to maintain both their physical and mental well-being during auditions and their early career.

Since the introduction of a planned programme of health and wellbeing transitions support, feedback from students, staff and employers has been positive. Students are indicating that they are more aware of and actively taking positive steps to ensure that they invest in the levels of fitness needed both to complete the programme and succeed in a career as a professional dancer.

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