# Royal Ballet School faces backlash as it champions plus-size dancers and same-gender partnerships



The Royal Ballet School’s recent initiative to embrace inclusivity through the inclusion of plus-size dancers and same-gender partnerships has ignited a fervent debate across social media platforms. While many applaud this progressive movement, asserting that “dance is for everybody to enjoy,” critics lament the perceived erosion of traditional ballet standards. This polarising dialogue comes at a time when the school is seeking to redefine its image following a disturbing body-shaming scandal that has cast a long shadow over its reputation.

Iain Mackay, the school's artistic director, conveyed a transformative vision for the institution in a recent interview. He stated, “Audiences want dancers they can relate to,” highlighting a shift from the archetypal slim ballerina. Mackay expressed strong support for the visibility of plus-size dancers, affirming that this approach is already taking root within the school. His comments signal a broader ambition to reshape ballet’s audience demographics and storytelling methods. He predicted an increase in same-gender pairings on stage, asserting that such inclusivity could foster new viewership and draw in a wider audience.

However, this inclusive vision has sparked significant backlash online. Detractors argue that the quality of ballet could suffer, with some expressing outright disdain for the potential for plus-size performers, stating, “What a shame Art is now corrupt.” Critics have also raised concerns about the physicality and technical demands of ballet, questioning whether plus-size dancers can meet these expectations. The harsh nature of some remarks echoed the sentiments of an op-ed in The Times, which declared that the presence of “a fatty at the ballet” was unacceptable. Such comments reflect a deeply entrenched belief about the physical ideals required in ballet, one that many hope the Royal Ballet School’s current reforms might begin to dismantle.

Amidst this heated discussion, some voices have emerged in favour of the changes, arguing that skill and artistry ought to triumph over fixed ideals of body size. Supporters have pointed to the impressive skills of dancers like Lizzy Howell, a teenager who gained viral fame for her ballet performances despite being plus-sized. Actor George Keywood has also rallied behind the concept, suggesting that he would prefer to see a plus-sized dancer showcase their talent over a conventionally slim performer. His remarks cut through the controversy, introducing a nuanced perspective on the topic of obesity and performance.

Indeed, the Royal Ballet School’s commitment to inclusivity follows a troubling episode in its history involving former student Ellen Elphick, who publicly detailed her experiences of body shaming while at the institution. Elphick, who has since settled a legal case against the school, recounted distressing incidents involving her teachers that led to lifelong psychological consequences, including an eating disorder. Elphick’s case has initiated a critical examination of body standards within ballet and emphasised the urgent need for reform.

The Royal Ballet School, while not admitting liability, has expressed a dedication to the welfare of its students, suggesting that the new measures are part of a larger strategy to cultivate a healthier environment. As the debate continues to unfold, the potential impact of these changes remains to be seen, with many hope to witness an evolution in both the art of ballet and its reception by audiences worldwide. Moving forward, the school's actions could pave the way for a more inclusive representation of dancers, regardless of size or gender orientation, thereby redefining what ballet can be in the 21st century.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.aol.com/stop-promoting-obesity-royal-ballet-172145320.html), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jan/30/royal-ballet-school-settles-with-former-student-over-body-shaming-claim)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.aol.com/stop-promoting-obesity-royal-ballet-172145320.html), [[3]](https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/31/style/ballet-school-pupil-settlement-gbr-scli-intl/index.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/11/royal-ballet-school-fat-body-shaming-toxic-bullying-student/), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly418jw5yyo), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/royal-ballet-school-ellen-elphick-b2689069.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.aol.com/stop-promoting-obesity-royal-ballet-172145320.html), [[3]](https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/31/style/ballet-school-pupil-settlement-gbr-scli-intl/index.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jan/30/royal-ballet-school-settles-with-former-student-over-body-shaming-claim), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/royal-ballet-school-ellen-elphick-b2689069.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.aol.com/stop-promoting-obesity-royal-ballet-172145320.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly418jw5yyo), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/royal-ballet-school-body-shaming-anorexia-settlement-dancer-b1208052.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.aol.com/stop-promoting-obesity-royal-ballet-172145320.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jan/30/royal-ballet-school-settles-with-former-student-over-body-shaming-claim> - The Royal Ballet School in London has reached a financial settlement with former student Ellen Elphick, who alleged that body-shaming during her training led to lifelong psychological damage. Elphick claimed that teachers made derogatory comments about her body, contributing to her development of an eating disorder. The school did not admit liability or issue an apology but emphasized its commitment to student welfare. This case is believed to be the first of its kind involving body-shaming in ballet. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jan/30/royal-ballet-school-settles-with-former-student-over-body-shaming-claim?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/31/style/ballet-school-pupil-settlement-gbr-scli-intl/index.html> - CNN reports that the Royal Ballet School in London has settled a lawsuit with former student Ellen Elphick, who claimed she developed an eating disorder due to body-shaming during her training. Elphick alleged that teachers made critical comments about her body, leading to anorexia. The school did not admit liability or apologize but stated it takes student well-being seriously. This settlement is considered a significant step in addressing body-shaming in ballet. ([cnn.com](https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/31/style/ballet-school-pupil-settlement-gbr-scli-intl/index.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/11/royal-ballet-school-fat-body-shaming-toxic-bullying-student/> - The Telegraph reports on allegations of body-shaming and bullying at the Royal Ballet School in London. Former student Ellen Elphick claimed that within two weeks of joining in 2009, a teacher publicly humiliated her by tracing a line around her body in front of a mirror and making derogatory comments. Elphick developed an eating disorder as a result. The BBC has spoken to over 50 ex-pupils who reported similar experiences of body-shaming and bullying at the school. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/11/royal-ballet-school-fat-body-shaming-toxic-bullying-student/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly418jw5yyo> - BBC News reports that the Royal Ballet School has reached a financial settlement with former student Ellen Elphick, who alleged that body-shaming during her training led to lifelong psychological damage. Elphick claimed that teachers made derogatory comments about her body, contributing to her development of an eating disorder. The school did not admit liability or issue an apology but emphasized its commitment to student welfare. This case is believed to be the first of its kind involving body-shaming in ballet. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly418jw5yyo?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/royal-ballet-school-ellen-elphick-b2689069.html> - The Independent reports that former Royal Ballet School student Ellen Elphick has settled a legal case over claims of body-shaming. Elphick, who attended the London school between 2009 and 2012, alleged that several teachers breached the school's duty of care by body-shaming her, leading to the development of an eating disorder. The school did not admit liability or offer an apology. This case is considered the first of its kind involving body-shaming in ballet. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/royal-ballet-school-ellen-elphick-b2689069.html?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/royal-ballet-school-body-shaming-anorexia-settlement-dancer-b1208052.html> - The Standard reports that a former dancer has reached a settlement with the Royal Ballet School after accusing the institution of body-shaming. Ellen Elphick developed an eating disorder while studying at the dance school in Covent Garden between 2009 and 2012. She believes her treatment by instructors, starting when she was 16, caused the disorder and brought a legal claim for damages. The school did not admit liability or offer an apology. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/royal-ballet-school-body-shaming-anorexia-settlement-dancer-b1208052.html?utm_source=openai))