# Royal Ballet School embraces inclusivity and transformation under new artistic director



The Royal Ballet School is undergoing a significant transformation under the leadership of its new artistic director, Iain Mackay, who has articulated a vision for the future of ballet that embraces inclusivity and challenges traditional standards of beauty and gender roles. In an interview with the Times, Mackay underscored the necessity for the prestigious institution to evolve in order to stay relevant to contemporary audiences, particularly in light of recently exposed issues surrounding body image and mental health within the dance community.

Mackay, who assumed the directorial role last September, stated that the focus will shift towards fostering strength, stamina, and narrative expression in dance training, rather than adhering to the conventional aesthetic expectations that have long characterised classical ballet. He remarked, "Audiences want dancers they can relate to," acknowledging a growing demand for diversity in the types of bodies represented in ballet.

In line with this shift, the Royal Ballet School is actively welcoming plus-sized dancers and preparing its students for an industry that increasingly values inclusivity. To further this aim, classes now include same-sex partnering, allowing male-male and female-female duets to become a standard part of contemporary choreography training. Mackay noted that traditional gender distinctions in partnering are becoming less relevant, reflecting a more modern approach to the art form.

The commitment to a more inclusive environment comes in response to serious concerns regarding student wellbeing. The school has faced scrutiny, particularly following an out-of-court settlement with former student Ellen Elphick, who alleged that she developed an eating disorder due to body-shaming by a teacher. Elphick's legal representatives detailed a particularly distressing incident where she was made to stand in front of a mirror while a teacher pointed out parts of her body that were deemed unacceptable, even suggesting that such areas could be "cut off 'if she had a knife'". While the school did not admit any liability in the settlement, it acknowledged the urgent need to prioritise student wellbeing, especially in terms of body image and mental health.

In light of these challenges, the Royal Ballet School has introduced new policies aimed at enhancing the safety and health of its dancers. These measures include monitoring the jump heights of students to assess fatigue levels, reducing overall dance hours to mitigate the risk of overtraining, and establishing 'refuelling stations' to normalise eating and energy replenishment during training sessions. Mackay has also emphasised the importance of monitoring 'relative energy deficiency', a condition where dancers expend more calories than they consume.

"The environment has always been tough. We can't get away [from the fact] that ballet training is hard," Mackay stated, acknowledging the rigorous nature of ballet while reiterating the need for a supportive framework. He expressed concern that dancers often face challenges in balancing the demands of elite training with their physical and emotional needs, a situation he described as a 'challenge'.

As the Royal Ballet School navigates these transformations, its leadership is clearly focused on reshaping the environment for current and future generations of dancers, aligning it with modern values of diversity, health, and inclusivity.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.royalballetschool.org.uk/2024/06/17/iain-mackay-appointed-as-artistic-director-of-the-royal-ballet-school/> - This URL confirms Iain Mackay's appointment as the Artistic Director of The Royal Ballet School and outlines his vision for the school, emphasizing the importance of student well-being and adapting to modern challenges.
* <https://www.royalballetschool.org.uk/2024/10/07/changes-to-white-lodge-training-programme-progression/> - The Royal Ballet School, under Iain Mackay, has implemented changes to its training program to focus on holistic student development, reducing stress and anxiety among students.
* <https://www.royalballetschool.org.uk/2024/12/03/from-scotland-to-the-royal-ballet-iain-mackays-ballet-journey-2/> - This article highlights Iain Mackay's commitment to making ballet more accessible and his focus on creating an environment where students can thrive both artistically and personally.
* <https://www.balletcoforum.com/topic/31671-first-interview-with-the-new-head-of-the-royal-ballet-school/> - This interview touches on Iain Mackay's vision for the future of ballet, discussing potential changes in how dancers are perceived and the role of inclusivity.
* <https://www.royalballetschool.org.uk/2024/11/12/from-scotland-to-the-royal-ballet-iain-mackays-ballet-journey/> - This article outlines Iain Mackay's journey from his beginnings in Scotland to becoming the Artistic Director of The Royal Ballet School, highlighting his dedication to broadening access to ballet.
* <https://no specific URL available due to lack of direct information on body image and mental health initiatives in the search results.> - The search results do not provide a specific URL addressing the Royal Ballet School's recent initiatives on body image and mental health. However, the school's broader commitment to student well-being is well-documented.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14611077/Plus-sized-dancers-sex-partners-Royal-Ballet-School.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data