

Disordered Eating Policy and Procedures

Policy owner:	Northern School of Contemporary Dance Senate
Lead contact:	Head of Student Support
Audience:	Northern School of Contemporary Dance: students & staff
Approving body:	Senate
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Supersedes:	NSCD Disordered Eating Policy & Procedures
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Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations	Equality Act 2010; Data Protection Act 2018; General Data Protection Regulations 2018
Related Policies, Procedures and Guidance:	Learning Culture & Codes of Practice, Terms and Conditions; Student Engagement & Support Through Studies Policy, Safeguarding Policy
UK Quality Code reference:	Quality Code Expectations for Quality; Advice and Guidance: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals; Enabling Student Achievement; Student Engagement
OfS Conditions reference:	Conditions B2, B3, C1
Equality and Diversity Considerations:	Policy should be available in accessible format for all students.
Date Equality and Diversity Assessment Completed:	N/A
Further information:	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 NSCD recognises that disordered eating is more common in aesthetic sports such as dance than in the general population, and that the dance environment can potentially increase risk for some individuals.
- 1.2 Disordered eating is also often unrelated to dance, with a wide combination of contributing factors.
- 1.3 NSCD is committed to preventing, identifying and responding to disordered eating as a key commitment to our students, because it can be both unhealthy and dangerous to allow problems to go undetected.
- 1.4 We aim to ensure that dance training is a positive and healthy experience for our students. It is therefore our goal to work towards the promotion of healthy eating and positive body image.
- 1.5 This policy outlines how staff and students can support a safe training environment by promoting healthy eating, positive body image and early intervention should issues arise.

2. Scope and Principles

2.1 The aim of this policy is to:

- Make clear the stance the NSCD takes on disordered eating
- Outline preventative measures NSCD takes so that disordered eating can be avoided wherever possible
- Facilitate identification so that participants with disordered eating can be identified early and supported appropriately
- Outline the processes to be followed if a concern is raised about a student's wellbeing in relation to suspected disordered eating, including guidelines around confidentiality
- Outline the support available to students experiencing disordered eating
- Outline how NSCD deals with problems relating to disordered eating, including how and when it may be decided to stop a student participating physically in their training.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 Many terms are related to this policy, including disordered eating, eating disorders, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, over eating, binge eating, night eating and others. Full definitions of these terms are included in *Appendix A* with a summary of the difference between an eating disorder and disordered eating below.

3.2 **Eating Disorders** (including anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and binge eating disorder) are clinical problems that only a trained professional such as a psychiatrist can diagnose and treat

3.3 **Disordered Eating** is a broader term, describing problems that may not qualify as clinical eating disorders. They are less serious physically, and more people will have disordered eating than full eating disorders. However, people will usually develop disordered eating before eating disorders, so it is helpful to view disordered eating as a potential warning sign and to support students to seek support and take preventative action as early as possible.

3.4 Eating problems exist on a continuum from healthy eating to severe clinical eating disorders. Although NSCD is not responsible for clinical diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders, we can offer preventative and ongoing support to students experiencing disordered eating, or an eating disorder, and can signpost students to access appropriate external treatment and support.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Preventative measures

NSCD aims to help **prevent** disordered eating by:

- Creating an open, supportive atmosphere, recognising that dancers may be more susceptible to struggles with food, eating or body image, but that guided support is available should problems occur
- Promoting NSCD support services so that all students know how to access support should they feel concerned for themselves or others in relation to eating
- Encouraging students to seek advice regarding healthy eating habits whenever needed
- Providing all students with information on healthier eating and lifestyles, including timetabled nutrition sessions
- Promoting a healthy approach to eating through providing adequate breaks for refuelling and rehydration
- Offering optional weight / Body Mass Index (BMI) monitoring if students feel this is helpful to their self-management
- Providing a range of nutritious and affordable food within the NSCD canteen
- Ensuring that the School library stocks relevant, accessible resources on healthy eating; disordered eating and recognising eating problems
- Providing students with free access to therapeutic support within the NSCD Wellbeing Team
- Assisting students with accessing external specialist providers, including nutritionists and NHS or Private specialists in eating disorders
- Providing relevant training to staff members on:
 - Identifying and sharing suspected eating concerns
 - Signposting students to support via the NSCD Wellbeing or Safeguarding Teams
 - Understanding this policy and the procedures in place that underpin it.
- Ensuring that this policy is accessible to all staff, students and their carers.

4.2 Identification of eating concerns

- Identifying a student who may be struggling with disordered eating, or an eating disorder is a sensitive issue that requires care and consideration
- Anyone in the NSCD community can play a key role in noticing cases of suspected disordered eating. This includes teaching and support staff, students and their families and all those who interact with students on behalf of NSCD.
- NSCD aims to provide all staff members and students with a basic understanding of the warning signs, behaviours and traits that could signal disordered eating
- A detailed list of physical, psychological and behavioural warning signs that could signal disordered eating are included in *Appendix B*
- Below is a summary of some of the key warning signs that may be observed within a dance training environment:
 - **Physical** signs may include:
 - Significant weight change (loss or gain)
 - Dizziness, fainting or excessive tiredness
 - Loss of muscle strength and stamina
 - Tooth decay
 - Discoloured or swollen hands or feet
 - Loss of concentration / focus
 - **Psychological** signs may include:
 - Overly body conscious
 - Compulsive exercise (over and above what is expected within the training)
 - Excessive perfectionism – specifically an overly self-critical stance
 - Denial of hunger or sensitivity around eating / meal times
 - **Behavioural** signs may include:
 - Wearing very baggy or multiple layers of clothing
 - Isolation from other students
 - Visiting bathroom immediately after meals
 - Low self-esteem
 - Self-harm
- NSCD will ensure that all staff members and students understand how and where to share any eating concerns, and to know that these will be dealt with sensitively, appropriately and in confidence (where possible)

4.3 Confidentiality

The disclosure of eating concerns is a sensitive matter and should always be dealt with carefully and supportively, following the principles below:

- Students are encouraged to share any concerns (relating to themselves or others) with any member of staff in School they feel comfortable doing so with. However, they should be

quickly informed that complete confidentiality cannot be possible, and that concerns may need to be shared with the Head of Student Support and/or Safeguarding Team to ensure that appropriate support, guidance and safety measures are put in place for the student

- Although we will respect confidentiality as far as possible, the Head of Student Support and Safeguarding Team may need to share serious concerns with others, including designated contacts or Heads of Studies / Tutors who are teaching the student (on a need-to-know basis) so that the student may be supported to participate in their studies safely
- Information may also be shared with relevant staff members in contact with the student when it is felt that a student may be a danger to themselves or others
- Disordered eating, in its most serious and long-term form, is a mental health condition and students presenting with clear signs of a recognised eating disorder are covered by the Equality Act and are entitled to the same support and reasonable adjustments as other disabled students. One of these entitlements is rights relating to passing on information. Where safe and practicable, permission should always be requested from the student to pass on information where a student's safety is at risk, or to put reasonable adjustments in place
- If NSCD consider a student is at serious risk of causing themselves harm, then complete confidentiality cannot be kept.

4.4 How NSCD deals with eating related problems when they arise

Once an eating related concern has been raised, the Head of Student Support and/or Safeguarding Lead will follow the process below as quickly as possible:

- Initial Meeting – a 1-2-1 meeting between the student and the Head of Student Support or Safeguarding Lead will take place. This is an informal conversation to remind and reassure the student that NSCD will support them in the best way possible, and to outline the support measures that are available
- If a student is under 18, or has given consent for guardians/carers to be involved, then a further conversation will be held with the student and their designated contacts to outline the support measures that may be accessed and put in place
- NSD believes that guardians to students under 18 have a right to know if their child is facing issues which may pose a serious risk to their health and/or wellbeing. However, we are also aware that legally speaking, persons under 18 who are considered mature enough to understand what an illness and treatment entail, have a lawful right to consent to treatment on their own, without involving guardians. *Note: if students are judged to be at immediate risk, guardians will be contacted whatever the students' age, although their agreement will still be sought before contact is attempted*
- Information on internal and external professional support services will be provided to the student so that they can seek help themselves or via a referral from the Wellbeing Team
- Recommending the student to a qualified professional is key. The Head of Student Support will take responsibility for assisting students with external referrals. The professional will depend on the nature of the situation e.g. nutritionist, GP or CAMHS.
- Ongoing support within NSCD will always be offered to the student. This can take the form of regular counselling, drop-in support, weight check / BMI monitoring (if useful), or conversations around training adjustments to support recovery
- Obviously, students cannot be forced to visit their GP or access support or treatment. If a student refuses to seek support, this will be documented within the student's confidential

file. A student may be required to obtain a letter from their GP confirming whether they are fit to continue taking part in their training

In case of rapid weight changes:

- If a student demonstrates rapid weight loss or gain, they may be asked to obtain a letter from their GP or other health professional to confirm whether physical activity should be stopped or reduced. This may also be the case if a student who has been away from training for some time due to weight concerns, needs to verify that they are fit to return and participate again.

4.5 NSCDs approach to adjusting or stopping training in response to eating concerns

- There is no single tool for reliable and effective assessment of the nutritional health of a dancer, and the serious implications of low/high body weight or disordered eating behaviours. Medical professionals use multiple assessments to arrive at an informed opinion on when someone may be at risk by doing intense physical activity. These may include monitoring Body Mass Index (BMI), evaluating body composition (percentage of muscle, bone and fat), blood tests and gynaecological history. Age, gender and ethnicity are all factors that should also be reviewed.
- Although NSCD is not responsible for diagnosing or treating disordered eating, we believe that an open conversation with students around when dancing should reduce or pause is necessary to avoid risk of health issues and physical problems such as fainting, stress fractures, dehydration, organ damage and even heart attacks if the body resorts to breaking down heart muscle for energy
- Body Mass Index (BMI) gives a broadly accepted measure of fat/health risk and is calculated by dividing your metric weight by your metric height² (kg/m²). The World Health Organisation recommends that the goal for individuals in the general adult population should be to maintain a BMI in the range of 18.5 to 24.9.
- BMI alone should not be taken as evidence of an eating disorder but is one of multiple factors that can help interpret health status.
- BMI should not be monitored in students under 18 as other factors will determine a healthy weight in students who have not yet reached adulthood (e.g age and individual growth charts)
- NSCD Training places high demands on students' physical and emotional energy and there are medical and ethical issues in allowing students to continue training where a very low or very high BMI is likely to mean future problems with their health, strength, bone health and, for female students, their fertility
- NSCD follows WHO and NHS recommendations that adult students should have a minimum BMI of 18.5 and a maximum of 24.9. If a student's BMI level is outside of these measures, careful consideration will be given as to whether a reduction or pause to the student's training schedule should be adopted. *Note:* students applying to join NSCD who's BMI falls outside of these recommended measures will not be negatively affected within the audition process. However, conversations may be had about whether support would be required should they accept a place.
- This reduction / pause to training will be in place until either the student reaches the minimum BMI, or they have provided evidence from a medical professional that they are safe to continue full time training

- Reduced Timetables and Alternative Assessment tasks will be devised to support a student's recovery. These will be discussed and agreed with the student, Programme Lead and Head of Student Support
- Training adjustments and recommendations are never intended to be punitive, although that may not always seem clear to the student concerned if they are asked to limit or defer their studies
- Students should (in most cases) still be encouraged to attend classes even when they are not physically involved. This enables students to continue to feel engaged, valued and included within their cohort. This also enables teaching staff to monitor concerns, and to support the ongoing learning of the student. Ultimately this will be the student's choice to decide whether it is helpful to their recovery to remain in classes
- Wherever possible, decisions about stopping training will be taken with the student's consent and there will be an agreement in place regarding returning to full training. This process will be monitored under the Student Engagement and Support Through Studies Policy
- Where a student's absence is longer than can be accommodated within the School's policies, a decision will need to be made regarding whether the student will need to restart the year
- A student's return to studies can entail social, physical and psychological pressures and it is normal for those recovering from an eating disorder to feel a deep sense of shame. Students will need ongoing support and sensitivity from staff and peers and will be offered support and regular contact with the Wellbeing Team and Head of Student Support.

5. Communication of Policy

5.1 This policy will be available for students to access via the NSCD Virtual Learning Environment (moodle) and on the public website on the Higher Education Student Policy page

5.2 A shortened accessible format of this policy is available and NSCD will aim to provide documents in different formats as requested.

6. Breach of the Policy

6.1 In instances when a student is unable to reach the minimum BMI over a prolonged period, does not provide medical verification that they are fit to train, or where there are persistent, ongoing concerns for their safety (and the safety of others in training), then NSCD has the right to ask a student to interrupt studies or withdraw from the course. This decision will only be made where there are serious causes for concern and will be discussed with the student, their guardians (where appropriate), the Head of Student Support/Safeguarding Lead and other relevant members of staff or external advisors.

7. Complaints

7.1 A student should seek advice immediately if they feel they have been subject to unprofessional treatment through NSCD, by speaking to the Quality Office, Student Services or the Head of Student Support to ensure appropriate advice and support is provided

7.2 Students who wish to make a complaint regarding the NSCD Disordered Eating Policy should seek resolution through the complaints procedure if unable to be resolved through informal means following the [Student Complaints Policy & Procedures](#)

7.3 Students dissatisfied with the decision regarding Interruption or withdrawal may appeal in line with the NSCD's Academic Appeals policy, where relevant.

8. Related Documents

- [NSCD Mental Health Charter and Principles of Good Practice](#)
- [Student Engagement & Support Through Studies Policy](#)
- [Non-Academic Misconduct Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Learning Culture & Code of Practice](#)
- [NSCD Student Protection Plan](#)

9. Key contacts

Name	Role	Email
Quality Office	Policy Oversight	quality.office@nscd.ac.uk
Student Services	Student Support or general enquiries	studentservices@nscd.ac.uk
Head of Student Support	Oversight of NSCD student support services	Ali.coleman@nscd.ac.uk
Safeguarding	Ensuring students are protected against any safeguarding risks	Safeguarding@nscd.ac.uk

10. Appendixes

Appendix A – Disordered Eating Definitions and Terminology

Up to date definitions can be accessed via: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/about-eating-disorders/types/>

Appendix B – Overview of psychological, behavioural and physical indicators of disordered eating

Up to date indicators of disordered eating can be accessed here: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/get-information-and-support/about-eating-disorders/signs-and-symptoms-of-an-eating-disorder/>

Within a specific dance training environment, factors that may indicate areas of concern include :

- Others (peers, housemates, NSCD staff, family) expressing concern over noticeable changes in weight, eating habits and/or related behaviours (self-induced vomiting, meal avoidance etc)
- Missing three+ consecutive periods
- Fine hair growth on face and body (lanugo)
- Incidence of stress fractures or recurrent injuries
- Incidence of related health issues (e.g. dizziness, excessive fatigue, collapsing)
- Tendency towards excessive additional exercising on top of regular training programmes
- Wearing multiple layers or noticeably baggy clothing that covers their physical form
- Complaints of regularly feeling cold – discolouration of hands and feet
- Dry, pale, and/or discoloured hair and skin
- Poor teeth and raw knuckles (a result of self-induced vomiting)
- Changes to concentration levels and disengagement in classes
- Changes in social behaviours e.g. becoming withdrawn or avoiding social situations
- Avoidance of any screening or physical tests

11. References

- One Dance UK (2023): Prevention, identification and action on disordered eating: Extracts from current working policies and research
- Smith, J. L. (2021). Supporting Students with Eating Disorders. Leeds: Student Minds.
- HEOPS: Fitness to Study for Students with Severe Eating Disorders: Guidance, Higher Education Occupational Practitioners' Society
- Northern Ballet (2022) Policy for the prevention, identification and action on disorder eating. Written by Sanna Nordin in consultation with representatives from all CATs. Approved September 2009 - edited by Annemarie Donoghue for Northern Ballet 2022.

12. Resources

- NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Eating-disorders
- Mind - www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/eating_distress
- Mental Health Foundation - www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mentalhealth-az/E/eating-disorders
- www.b-eat.co.uk
- www.eating-disorders.org.uk
- www.danceuk.org