

## Low BMI and Disordered Eating Guidelines

### Purpose

This document contains guidelines for students and staff on how Bird College will work with students regarding concerns relating to low BMI and disordered eating to ensure that we provide a healthy and safe educational environment alongside high quality dance and musical theatre training.

### Background

We believe that dance and musical theatre training should be a positive and healthy experience for all students. It is therefore our goal to work towards the promotion of mental/physical health awareness, healthy eating, and positive body image. At Bird College, we see prevention, identification, and holistic support as part of our commitment to our students.

### Definitions

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure that uses height and weight to work out if weight is healthy. The BMI calculation divides an adult's weight in kilograms by their height in metres squared. For most adults, an ideal BMI is in the 18.5 to 24.5 range. For under 18s, the BMI calculation takes into account age, gender as well as height and weight.

<b>BMI</b>	<b>Nutritional Status</b>
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5-24.9	Normal Weight
25.0-29.9	Overweight
30-39.9	Obesity

Eating disorders present as food restriction or overeating with or without purging. They affect mental and physical health and require diagnosis by a professional. Treatment depends on what kind of eating disorder a person may have and is available on the NHS or privately. Bird College is not responsible for diagnosing or treating such conditions, but we are responsible for monitoring the health and wellbeing of our students and taking appropriate action if we have concerns.

Not all people fit the diagnosis of anorexia, bulimia or compulsive eating but they may have a disordered relationship with food, that can evolve into a more serious eating problem. It is why early intervention is important even if a person believes that they are well for now.

## **Confidentiality**

Students can speak to their tutors in confidence, however, there may be times when it is necessary for other members of staff to be made aware of a particular issue or difficulties. For example, if a medical condition has an impact on the student's training, the student will be encouraged to disclose the information to the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing). Further to this, information may also be shared between members of staff if they feel that a student is at risk or a risk to others.

## **Policy**

Bird College requires students over 18 yrs to have a minimum BMI of 18.5.

For students between 16 and 18yrs, BMI is not enough. The requirement is for the percentile of a teenager to be between the 5th percentile up to the 85th percentile (for further information on how to calculate under 18s BMI please refer to Appendix A). If a student's BMI falls under the minimum level, this will be considered a cause for concern and the student will not be permitted to engage fully with the dance/musical theatre aspects of the course. Where this BMI level is not consistently maintained the college reserves the right to ask a student to pause, interrupt or withdraw from the programme.

If we are made aware of other eating disturbance, irrespective of a student's BMI, we are obliged to investigate this in whichever way we think is appropriate and have the student under medical supervision for their sake and for the sake of their peers.

Bird college is committed to providing timely, appropriate, clear, and consistent support to students and staff to ensure robust and healthful status.

We believe that starting with complete transparency of these guidelines and recommendations will help reassure students and their families that we are here to support them. Effective and timely intervention is the most effective way to ensure that all our students can perform at their best, and minimise the risks associated with a disturbed relationship with food.

## **Recommendations**

Bird College requires students aged 16 to 18 to have BMI which falls within the percentile range of 5<sup>th</sup> up to 85<sup>th</sup>. If a student is underweight, they will need to seek medical support straight away. Medical intervention is particularly important for underage students as eating disorders in teenagers cause serious changes in eating habits that can lead to major, even life-threatening health problems. Recommendations for this age range do not differ from the recommendations specified for over 18s.

Bird college requires students over 18 to have a minimum BMI of 18.5. If a student's BMI is below the stipulated minimum level, this will be a cause for concern.

The College has a legal and ethical duty to provide safety in all aspects of learning. This lies at the heart of every action plan put in place for students with disordered eating behaviours. We recognise that not all disordered eating behaviours manifest by a low BMI count and therefore it is paramount that we treat each presentation with safety and recovery at the forefront of each plan. Students who may not have a low BMI, but have presented with disordered eating behaviours, (e.g. Purging, binge eating, use of diuretics or laxatives) will be asked to stop dancing and see their GP immediately for a full check-up. This is because medical evidence clearly states that life threatening conditions, including cardiovascular problems, can be triggered by these behaviours. Therefore, full timetable participation will not resume until the GP has cleared the student to participate in physical classes.

If any member of staff or a student is concerned about a student's wellbeing because of a significant weight loss, changes in behaviour or eating patterns, they should contact the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing) who will arrange a meeting with the student. Students can also seek support directly, self-disclose by talking to a trusted member of staff, or through the health declaration on the application form. Family members are also encouraged to contact the college if they are concerned.

In cases related to low BMI, the following will happen:

- The Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing) will arrange a meeting
- An Action Plan will be devised and agreed

The Action Plan will provide details of the amount of physical training the student can undertake, the classes and activities the student will not be permitted to participate and the additional available support available to the student (e.g., Counselling, nutrition consultation). BMI checks will be taken at regular intervals to prevent further BMI decline and adjust action plan accordingly.

Student's GP will be contacted if the student discloses having an eating disorder and the BMI is below the minimum level. For female students, medical investigation is required if periods have stopped.

If the matter is urgent and presents a high risk to the safety of a student or others, an Emergency 'Fitness to Study' panel will be convened, where decisions can be made with regards to what would be in the best interest of the student.

If Bird College has any concerns, it reserves the right to seek an opinion from a medical practitioner of their choosing.

Depending on the BMI level and whether an eating disorder has been confirmed, the college may ask the student to pause the studies for a specific length of time to focus on treatment and recovery. The student may return to college to resume the full training programme if the BMI is above 18.5, or remain on an alternative timetable if the BMI is between 17.5 and 18.5.

## **BMI Recommendations (NHS, WHO)**

Below 17	Interruption of studies
17 – 17.5	Required to pause studies
17.5 – 18.5	Alternative Timetable: to prevent electrolyte imbalances, heart problems, muscle wasting, and injuries
18.5-24.9	Full training programme

### **Guidelines for recommending that a student with a low BMI or a confirmed eating disorder interrupts the studies to focus on treatment and recovery:**

- Significant compromised physical state (BMI lower than 17).
- Significant compromised psychological and social function (i.e., suicide risk, profound social withdrawal, marked cognitive impairment)
- Need for intensive treatment (day patient or inpatient) as recommended by a specialist in eating disorders.

### **Guidelines for recommending that a student can remain, or return to the course:**

- BMI above 17.5 (stable and uncompromised physical state), no electrolyte disturbance or cardiovascular instability – Alternative timetable
- BMI above 18.5 – can resume full training programme
- Sufficient psychological and social functioning to be able to cope with the demands of the course/student life (no suicide risk, little if any cognitive impairment, able to function socially)
- Willingness to engage in whatever management programme is recommended by a specialist in eating disorders or a medical practitioner.

## **Variables to consider when Implementing Recommendations**

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a proxy measurement for medical risk in eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa, whilst it is helpful to have a BMI in mind, below which students are regarded as unfit to study, this is a guidance value and should not be the only criterion applied when making the recommendations. Global majority students, specifically those from Asia, are recognised to have lower average BMIs. It is also less reliable at extremes of height, in diabetics and in men (who have a higher average BMI range). Rapid weight loss, physical co morbidity, excessive exercise, fluid restriction, vomiting or purging, laxative use, imply a greater medical risk as do signs of muscle loss and weakness, postural hypotension or dehydration. Some eating disorder sufferers may control their weight a fraction above a certain BMI in order to be passed as fit, but will remain unwell. It is also clear that while many students are cognitively compromised at very low weight, some seem able to continue to study without obvious impairment and achieve good assessment results.

The college will consider the wide-ranging variables when making recommendations on each individual case.

## Student Guidelines

### If you have concerns about yourself

- If you have noticed significant weight loss and you suspect that you may have a disordered eating problem, we recommend that you make an immediate appointment with your GP, who would be your first point of contact for medical professional help. We also strongly encourage you to speak to a member of staff or contact the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing) or the Counselling Service. Early intervention makes recovery much more likely to succeed, so it is important that you seek support as soon as you can.

### If you have concerns about a friend

- If you have concerns about one of your peers, please encourage them to refer to this document. Supporting a friend in distress can feel overwhelming and upsetting to witness, you should raise your concerns with the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing) or a trusted member of staff as soon as possible. We can provide you with support too.

### If one of your tutors has concerns about you

- One of your tutors may become concerned about your significant weight loss and therefore feel that your continuing participation in class may represent a health and safety risk to yourself and others. When such concerns are raised you will be contacted by the Assistant principal (Student Wellbeing) to arrange a meeting at which your BMI will be checked.

At this point, 2 pathways are possible:

1. if your BMI is below 18.5 you will not be permitted to take part in the full training programme. A range of options and an Action Plan best suited to your needs will be discussed with you. These may include:
  - Advice and support for maintaining a healthy diet that provides you with sufficient energy to enable you to meet the demands of the course (Referral to Nutrition Clinic, online resources)
  - Psychological & emotional support, talking therapy (Referral to Counselling service)
  - Require that you book an appointment with your GP to seek medical support.
  - Alternative timetable with limits set on the type and range of dance/musical theatre activities and time spent training each day.
  - Consent to open a channel of communication between your parents/partner/friend and the college.
  - Taking some time away from your studies to be able to fully concentrate on your recovery plan (Pause of studies)

- If you are deemed at risk the college will have no alternative but to contact your parent/guardian/emergency contact
  - Interruption of studies to focus on recovery.
2. If no eating disorder, or any other health issue that may hinder your progress, is confirmed, and your BMI is above 18.5, you will be permitted to continue in full time training. However, we will as a precautionary measure, continue to monitor you through regular informal meetings.

If an eating disorder is confirmed, the college will discuss with you a range of possible options and agree on a course of action which may include some of the points stated above, as well as:

- Referral and engagement in medical specialised treatment as a condition to remain on the course.
- Regular check-ups with GP
- Relevant staff will seek your consent to maintain contact with your GP/Clinical psychologist/Dietician/eating disorder specialist to ensure that you are being appropriately supported by the college.

Where we are unable to agree an Action Plan with you, a recommendation may be made to convene a Fitness to Study Panel. In such circumstances, Bird College will have a range of options available to you to ensure your safety and the safety of others.

Alternative Timetable - An alternative timetable will remain in place until you have reached the minimum BMI level (18.5) required by the college. We may ask confirmation from a specialist that you can return to the full training programme.

Interruption of studies – An interruption of studies will remain until the following academic year and you will only be able to return to college if you meet the required BMI level (18.5). Bird College will require a letter from your practitioner confirming that you are fit to resume the intensive physical programme at Bird college.

These guidelines were developed from the following sources:

- [Northern School of Contemporary Dance 'Disordered eating Guidelines'](#)
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance 'Trinity Laban Guidelines on concerns relating to Body Mass Index (BMI)
- [Conservatoire for dance and Drama 'Responding to Students with Disordered Eating'](#)
- [One Dance UK 'Prevention, identification and action on disordered eating: Extract from current working policies and research'](#)

- [Higher Education Occupational Physicians / Practitioners 'Fitness to study for Students with Severe eating Disorders: Guidance, Higher Education Occupational Practitioner's Society](#)
- [CDC](#)

Bird College Low BMI and Disordered Eating Guidelines have been developed with input from various experts in the field of eating disorders:

- Deanne Jade – Clinical Psychologist - Founder and Principal of the 'National Centre for Eating Disorders'
- Bernadette Wright – (Accred) Counsellor/Psychotherapist & Master Practitioner in Eating Disorders. Bernadette also provides trainings to professionals working with those suffering from eating disorders.
- Professor Julia Buckroyd – Broadcaster, Therapist and author of 'Understanding your Eating'

## Document Control

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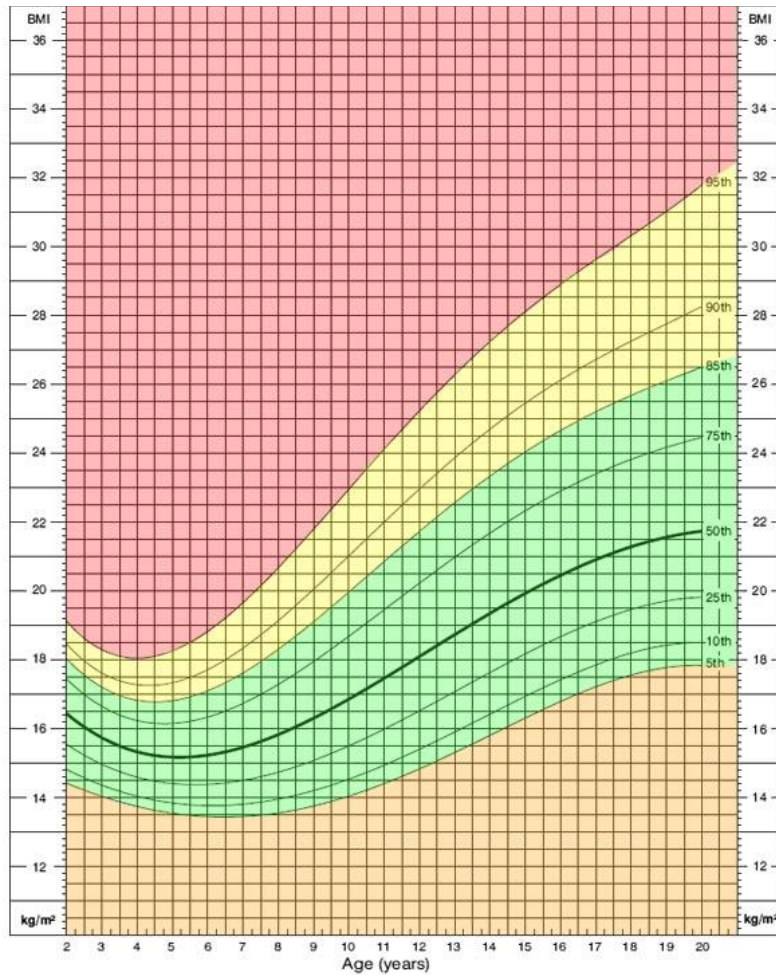
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## Appendix A:

The below table provides the Body Mass Index and the corresponding BMI-for-age percentile Body mass index-for-age percentiles for girls ages 2 to 20 years.



### Percentile



- underweight, less than the 5th percentile
- healthy weight, 5th percentile up to the 85th percentile
- overweight, 85th to less than the 95th percentile
- has obesity, equal to or greater than the 95th percentile