SCOTTISH BALLET

HEALTH

An International Centre for Dance Health

Contents

Mission	**3**
Approach	**8**
Reach	**12**
Impact	**24**
Leadership & Advocacy	**27**
The Future	**29**
Acknowledgements	**34**



SB Elevate®, dance for multiple sclerosis classes at Scottish Ballet HQ. Photo by Andy Ross.

‘My balance and strength have improved, and this makes me more confident to do other activities. I like being able to say that ‘I do ballet’ and this makes me confident too’

SB Elevate® participant

Mission



SB Health classes at Scottish Ballet. Photo by Andy Ross.

Our Mission

Scottish Ballet's mission is to inspire on stage and beyond — we aim to move people by sharing our passion and creating exceptional dance.

Our company values underpin our mission. We strive to hold these values in balance, bringing them to life for our stakeholders — our company, audiences, supporters and communities — in everything we produce and deliver:



SB Health is Scottish Ballet's health initiative. Since 2013, we have worked with our communities and specialist partners to develop seven pioneering dance programmes to bring movement and joy across the lifespan to:

- People living with multiple sclerosis, including their care partners and families
- People living with Parkinson's, including their care partners and families
- People living with dementia, including their care partners and families
- People living with Long Covid
- Young people who have faced childhood adversity and their support workers
- Young people, schools, and educators
- Dance artists, musicians, and artists
- Health and social care professionals
- Adults and young people who face barriers to accessing creative arts



SB Health staff delivering class at Scottish Ballet. Photo by Andy Ross.

Extending Scottish Ballet's mission, SB Health improves lives every day through the transformational power of dance. Empowering communities across Scotland and beyond to reach their fullest potential — through specialist dance health programmes, research and training. In 2023, Scottish Ballet launched as an International Centre for Dance Health. In 2025 we were designated Europe's first Jameel Arts & Health Lab, Healing Arts Centre of Excellence. We were delighted to win One Dance UK Dance for Health award in 2026.



SB Duet in care homes. Photo by Andy Ross.

Priorities

Between 2021–2023 our objectives were to sustain and nurture our core SB Health programmes, to grow and invest in partnerships, to incubate and innovate new models and ideas and to engage with more communities in Scotland. Looking ahead, we want to measure the success of our activities based on the impact to people's health and wellbeing.

From 2025–2028 our priorities are to:

Reach
more communities in Scotland across every life stage, including island and rural areas

Innovate
across our existing programmes, in response to evidence and need

Embed
our work across health, social care and education

Sustain
our core SB Health programmes

So that:

- People in Scotland have improved quality of life through dance
- Young people feel more confident and happy
- People living with neurological conditions can sustain daily living tasks
- Older adults feel more supported in their healthy ageing
- Health, social care, and education professionals feel more confident to signpost to SB Health
- Health professionals feel more resilient in their roles

SB Health staff delivering class.
Photo by Sandie Maciver.

Approach



Our Approach

Beyond the stage, beyond the diagnoses

We are experts in dance and creative movement. Every day we work with elite dancers to produce outstanding performances for audiences across Scotland, the UK and internationally. We nurture the dancer in all our participants, and just like our professional dancers we support our SB Health dancers to reach their fullest potential in every class.

Each SB Health activity is inspired by the repertoire and artistic vision of Scottish Ballet, and we approach individuals' creativity with ambition and empathy.



SB Health classes at Wing Hong Centre. Photo by Sally Jubb.



SB Health Social Cafe at Scottish Ballet. Photo by Sally Jubb.

Dance for everyone, across the lifespan

SB Health provides entry points to dance health throughout the lifecycle, from young people's wellbeing to people living with neuro-degenerative conditions, early intervention to self-management and specialist support in health settings. We care for care partners too, offering opportunities for health professionals and support for unpaid carers. Social Cafés are an intrinsic part of SB Health, providing a safe space for people to get to know and support each other — taking place alongside classes.

Person-centred programmes

Our pioneering programmes place the individual and their unique lived experience at the heart of its collaborative design, tackling pressing societal challenges in health and community wellbeing. We encourage our participants to be ambitious for themselves and for their community. We involve families and focus groups in our programme and evaluation designs, and use ongoing feedback to refine our programme models. For this reason, every iteration of our programmes is unique to the community dancing with us.



SB Health class at Scottish Ballet.
Photo by Christina Riley.



SB Health class at Scottish Ballet.
Photo by Sally Jubb.

Reach

Classes & Programmes

Where do we work?

Our live, in-person sessions are delivered across Scotland. We also deliver an advanced hybrid model so that people living with neurological conditions can join sessions online from their home, community or health setting, removing the barriers of geography, weather, and changing symptoms. We work with communities in Scotland and worldwide to empower local organisations, groups and artists to take ownership to deliver our models in their local setting.

Multiple sclerosis

A signature programme of SB Health, SB Elevate®, is our dance for multiple sclerosis programme, which launched in 2019. Scotland has one of the highest rates of MS in the world. It is estimated that there are over 17,000 people currently living with MS in Scotland[1].

The SB Elevate® programme was conceived and designed in 2018 with a multi-dimensional perspective involving Scottish Ballet's Dance Health Team, academics, researchers and MS specialists in Glasgow, Florida and Washington D.C.

A key aim of SB Elevate® is to offer tools and strategies that participant dancers can draw on outside of the studio to support their daily living, as well as their mental and physical health. Scottish Ballet has trained dance artists and musicians to deliver the SB Elevate® model in Glasgow, Tayside, Orkney and Dorchester, and delivered bespoke Dance for MS training in Zurich.

'As a total non-dancer, Elevate® has opened my mind and confidence to enjoy dancing. I feel that my body is responding so well to the different moves and my brain is challenged to embrace the instruction'

SB Elevate® participant

Parkinson's

Established in 2016, Dance for Parkinson's Scotland is a dance health programme that supports people living with Parkinson's to experience the benefits of dance and creativity — improving balance, spatial awareness, confidence and fluidity in movement.

Parkinson's is one of the world's fastest growing neurological conditions. Every week around 30 people in Scotland receive a diagnosis. There are currently around 13,000 people in Scotland living with Parkinson's[2].

From 2018–2021, Scottish Ballet and Dance Base worked in partnership to initiate a national Dance for Parkinson's network, supporting local partners across Scotland in the development of a further eight regional hubs. By 2019, 210 people living with Parkinson's were registered to in-person classes across the hubs. We established a network of 24 dance artists and 10 musicians across Scotland.

The programme is inspired by Dance for PD®, created in 2001 by Olie Westheimer (Brooklyn Parkinson's Group) and David Leventhal (Mark Morris Dance Group).

SB Health class at Scottish Ballet.
Photo by Christina Riley.



'I have quite a lot of rigidity... it is affecting my walking, and I feel that has improved at the end of the session; I always feel more mobile'

Dance for Parkinson's Scotland participant



SB Health classes at Dixon Community. Photo by Sally Jubb.

Dementia and brain health

Time to Dance® is our dementia-friendly dance programme.

There are an estimated 90,000 people with dementia in Scotland. Around 3,000 of these people will be under the age of 65 years. About one third live in residential care, making up around 65% of the overall care home population[3].

Time to Dance involves weekly classes, care home and community activities for people living with dementia, their families, friends, children, grandchildren, partners and carers. All ages and experience levels are welcome. By developing communication, expression, coordination, balance, creativity and social interaction, dancing engages the brain and improves quality of life.

Scottish Ballet has delivered bespoke Dance for Dementia training to cultural partners in China, Germany and Scotland; supporting more people living with dementia to access the wellbeing benefits of dance.

'When the drums or piano start, [my friend] 'feels' the music and comes alive. The transformation is a joy to watch. The social aspect with others at tea time adds to this and by the time we leave Scottish Ballet, her mood and cognition is significantly better'

Time to Dance® Participant

Supporting healthy ageing

The Scottish Government is keen to see a shift in the balance of acute care, to prevention and promotion of health in the community. Dance can play an important role in contributing to a Scotland where people can thrive in their community[4]. In addition to our Regenerate programme for over 60's, Scottish Ballet is developing prevention classes that directly support brain health, strength, balance, and social connection, to enable improved wellbeing in later life.



SB Health class at Scottish Ballet. Photo by Sally Jubb.

'...if physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent or treat.'

'The evidence of the need to maintain strength and balance as we age, which may require different sorts of physical activity... has strengthened.'

UK CMOs, Professor Chris Whitty, Professor Michael McBride, Professor Gregor Smith, Professor Isabel Oliver [4.1]

Young people's wellbeing

Scottish Ballet's work with young people uses dance to respond to social challenges and make a positive change in young people's lives; whether through access to a new cultural experience, addressing a specific issue, or realising the wellbeing benefits of dance and creativity.

Our projects are carefully designed to support wellbeing, engage young people in creative decision making, and foster self-expression through movement. Our collaborative approach welcomes young people from all backgrounds and experiences, and we work alongside young people, schools and specialist organisations, supporting participants to contribute in the way that is right for them.

Safe to Be Me®

Safe to Be Me® is a signature programme of SB Health , delivered in primary schools across Scotland. Through creative dance workshops the programme explores identity and promotes inclusivity, empathy, and allyship in schools. Delivered by Scottish Ballet in partnership with key stakeholder organisations, Safe to Be Me® opens up creative exploration around topics that challenge prejudice and offer a range of creative tools to support resilience and wellbeing.

Dance performance is a key element of Safe to Be Me®. All students experience watching a specially commissioned dance work, before working with Scottish Ballet's expert team to explore the core project themes and create their own performance.



Safe to Be Me® delivery in schools. Photo by Tim Edgeler.

'I learned that it is ok to be yourself and you should not change who you are just to fit in'

Safe to Be Me® participant



Safe to Be Me® delivery in schools. Photo by Andy Ross.

'Safe to Be Me® had positive impacts on children's self confidence, comfort with diversity, accurate and non-stigmatising language use, and motivation for justice against unfairness'

Research team at the Strathclyde Institute of Education[5].

The Close

The Close is a first-time ballet experience, delivered in partnership with care and education specialists for young people, aged 12-18, who have faced adverse childhood experiences. Each project is co-created with the young people and staff participating. Through bespoke artistic projects inspired by Scottish Ballet's productions, The Close aims to help young people build confidence, communication, self-expression, interpersonal, and creative skills.

Participants engage with new and enriching cultural experiences — attending performances, watching rehearsals, engaging with different departments of Scottish Ballet (e.g. wardrobe or technical) — as well as listening to talks from Scottish Ballet dancers, learning company repertoire, and tasks designed to support creative decision making and foster a sense of agency.



The Close.
Photo by Alicja Jaskiewicz.



Healthcare staff dance together in Queen Elizabeth University Hospital. Photo by Mihaela Bodlovic.

Wellbeing support for health and care professionals

Health at Hand® was developed during the pandemic to support physical and emotional wellbeing for people working in the NHS and Social Care services. The programme includes a series of short, on-demand movement and breath resources titled Energise, Rejuvenate, Relaxation (for the start, middle and end shifts, respectively), and 20-minute Restore sessions that offer gentle, trauma-informed support for individuals at more intense periods. We deliver live Health at Hand® sessions in-person and online, including a Wellbeing at Work toolkit.

‘I’ve started to incorporate some of the movements I’ve learnt into my sessions with patients. I’m also exploring a regular dance class for myself’

Health at Hand® online wellbeing class

Bedside ballet — SB Duet

In 2021, Scottish Ballet launched SB Duet, a series of short digital and audio resources designed with and for people with reduced mobility to gently move together with their companions or carers. The movements can be done safely by people in bed, at the bedside or seated — in care settings, hospitals or at home. This means that people at risk of isolation can take part in dance.

We deliver training for health and care professionals to help build confidence to use the resources with patients or residents. Care home staff reported that the combination of movement, music, social connection, and self-expression enlivens residents.



SB Duet in care homes.
Photo by Andy Ross.

‘I’ve laughed, and I’ve smiled with someone. I always try to do something that helps with passing the day, or else we just keep sitting around all day’

SB Duet participant, care home resident

‘Their mood really lifts; you can actually see it’

SB Duet, care home staff



SB Health classes at Dixon Community. Photo by Sally Jubb.

‘The magnitude of the benefit is really very large, and without it, people can be stuck in their house. It’s more than a luxury I think, it empowers patients to take control over their own self’

Healthcare professional[6]

Long Covid

In 2023, Scottish Ballet piloted a movement-based programme for people living with long Covid. The programme was designed in collaboration with people with lived experience and health professionals. Our on-demand resources offer tools to help people self-manage symptoms whilst exploring their creativity.

The long Covid support programme includes nine digital assets, a virtual class model and a commissioned report evidencing the impact of the programme. Key learnings from the pilot included the importance of pacing and encouraging participants to decide what they could realistically achieve, based on their energy and other activities and responsibilities that day.

'This is such a positive and calming environment, and the positivity stays with me for days after a session and is noticeable by people around me'

Long Covid participant



SB Health class at Scottish Ballet. Photo by Andy Ross.

SB Elevate at Scottish Ballet.
Photo by Andy Ross.

Impact

Feelings & Numbers

88%

of Dance for Parkinson's Scotland dancers said 'Dancing improves my flexibility' and 'Dancing improves my coordination'[7]

94%

of Time to Dance dancers living with dementia responded very positively to the statements 'I felt happy', 'I felt comfortable', 'I enjoyed the company of others'[8]

516

In 2025/26, SB Health delivered 516 separate events, including talks, projects, workshops, and weekly classes, available online and in person

6,178

In 2025/26, SB Health engaged 6,178 participations, from people at all stages of life, living across Scotland



SB Health class at Scottish Ballet. Photo by Andy Ross.



Scottish Ballet Dancers in *Unicorn*, choreographed by Aya Kobayashi. Photo by Sally Jubb.

89%

of Safe to Be Me® participants said 'I worked as part of a team' and 84% said 'I felt respected' and 'my ideas were listened to'[9]

12,500

Health at Hand® resources were accessed 12,500 times within their first three months of going live

1,000

NHS staff signed up for our Restore webinar within one week of launching the event

SB Health staff delivering workshop to healthcare staff in Queen Elizabeth University Hospital. Photo by Mihaela Bodlovic.

Leadership & Advocacy



Best Practice

SB Health is directed by Scottish Ballet's Engagement Team, with governance from Scottish Ballet, Scottish Ballet's Board of Directors, and SB Health sub-committee. The SB Health sub-committee includes senior professionals from the health sector.

In 2020, Scottish Ballet created an SB Health Research Committee working with senior staff from Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS). The committee is chaired by and comprises researchers and healthcare professionals from Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the universities of Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, Queen Margaret University, and the NHS in Scotland. On behalf of Scottish Ballet, the Research Committee fosters and promotes collaboration, brokers connections in health and social care, academia, local government and third sector promotes the dissemination of research findings and encourages the translation of research into practice.

We've built long-standing research collaboration with the Royal Scottish Conservatoire, Georgetown Lombardi University Medical Centre in Washington, University of Florida's Center for Arts in Medicine, University of Edinburgh and Glasgow Caledonian University.

Scottish Ballet is a collaborator in an MS Doctoral Training Centre, led by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). Over the next five years, we will work with GCU and the RCS to support a part-time Dance for MS PhD focusing on the SB Elevate® programme. The PhD is one of eight studies dedicated to exploring the impact of physical activity for people with moderate to severe MS symptoms.

'Dance Health removes the stigma of being a patient and lifts them to a place beyond expectations of themselves, as a dancer. This brings significant confidence, wellbeing, the ability to express themselves and to enable their own recovery'

Dr. Dave Caeser, NHS Lothian



Safe to Be Me™ participants.
Photo by Andy Ross.

The Future

Pioneering

Scottish Ballet has a dual role in arts and health. As well as delivering dance health programmes, we are change leaders — advocating for improved physical, mental and social wellbeing through the arts, across Scotland and internationally.

Knowledge sharing

Through training leaders in arts, education and health, including people with lived experience, and promoting the health impact of our work, we can ensure more people can benefit from our tried and tested dance health programmes. Our training and mentoring programmes range from one-year accredited courses to bite-size CLPL (career-long professional learning) and includes options for health, social care and creative professionals.

Every year, Scottish Ballet's dance health team welcomes students from University of St Andrews, University of Dundee and University of Glasgow on SB Health placements — supporting the next generation of health professionals. Students contribute to advocacy, evaluation, data collection and the creation of information resources, while learning about the benefits of dance health.

'I hope that dance health, particularly Scottish Ballet's work, could be incorporated more into the curriculum of healthcare students, so there is more awareness of the power of dance and music earlier on in a healthcare professional career'

Healthcare student, University of Dundee



SB Health classes at Wing Hong Centre. Photo by Sally Jubb.

Social prescribing

Scottish Ballet welcomes social prescribing referrals and signposting via health, third sector and education pathways. SB Health recently led a three-year strategic project which tested a national model of dance health on prescription, delivered in collaboration with Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland. The aim was to explore referral pathways into SB Health nuerological programmes, to help more people across Scotland to access our creative health support.

Find out more by visiting scottishballet.co.uk/social-prescribing

'Scottish Ballet are at the forefront of this exciting network and their Dance for Parkinson's class is an excellent example of how the arts can contribute meaningfully to improve people's experience of chronic disease, whilst also improving social contact'

Chief Medical Officer for Scotland[10]

Healing Arts Scotland

In 2024, Scottish Ballet partnered with the Jameel Arts and Health Lab, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, to deliver Healing Arts Scotland — a week-long national event which welcomed experts from across the globe, advocating for improved physical, mental and social wellbeing through the arts. The activation event was produced together with a national coalition of organisations and communities across Scotland, with partners from the UK and internationally from culture, science, health, education, third sector and government.

The aim of Healing Arts Scotland (HAS) 2024 was to catalyse and strengthen a network of communities that can positively address current health concerns and inequalities across Scotland and the UK.

Building on our relationship with key HAS stakeholders, we will continue to develop strategic pathways that improve access to dance health and inspire systems-level change.

Find out more by visiting scottishballet.co.uk/has-report-2024



Healthcare staff, dancers from SB Health, Scottish Ballet's Youth Exchange and Youth Creative Collective programmes dance together at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital. Photo by Mihaela Bodlovic.



SB Health participants performed outside the Scottish Parliament for a public performance to mark the start of Healing Arts Scotland, a country-wide celebration of arts and health. Photo by Andrew Perry.

‘Change campaigns usually work because they either appeal to our minds or our hearts. The best campaigns, however, do both — organically, honestly, collectively.

This is what Healing Arts Scotland 2024 achieved. For one week, across the Scottish nation, Scottish Ballet together with the Jameel Arts & Health Lab and many other partners created a celebration of the arts that highlighted its potential to profoundly impact our health across the life-course’

Nils Fietje, Founding Co-Director, Jameel Arts & Health Lab; Technical Officer, WHO Europe

Acknowledgements



SB Health class at Scottish Ballet.
Photo by Hazel Mirsepasi.

Our Partners & Supporters

Scottish Ballet's health initiative has been made possible by the generous support of Scottish Government, trusts and foundations, sponsors and patrons.

To see the list of our most recent partners and supporters please visit scottishballet.co.uk/sb-health-supporters

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