

Health and wellbeing education in British conservatoires

Louise Atkins

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, UK

Musicians' health and wellbeing is rapidly becoming an essential component within the training of aspiring musicians all over the world. At the forefront of tackling these issues are educational institutions, with conservatoires in particular leading the way in creating educational programs that promote the ideal of a sustainable technique and lifestyle for the professional musicians of the future. Strategic frameworks for health and wellbeing education are beginning to develop in other countries as national strategies. However, development in British music schools is not so cohesive, and each institution takes a different approach to the delivery of their health and wellbeing provision. This project investigates current health and wellbeing education programs on offer in British conservatoires and presents the students' view of this area of their education. In this investigation, a wide range of health and wellbeing activities were revealed, with conservatoires showing support to students through a variety of activities, from practical classes to research opportunities. However, despite this extensive range of services, a high proportion of students revealed that they felt their institution was not providing adequate support for their health and wellbeing, stating that they would like a more proactive approach.

Keywords: health and wellbeing; education; music students; injury prevention; conservatoires

Health and wellbeing is rapidly becoming a major consideration for professional musicians who are looking toward avoiding injury, prolonging their careers, and performing to the best of their abilities. Studies with particular instrumental groups of college level students have shown high incidences of injury, with between 30% and 50% of students being affected at some point in their education (Guptill *et al.* 2000). Musicians' health and wellbeing has

therefore become a topic for growth and development within educational institutions and is rapidly becoming an essential component within the training of aspiring practical musicians all over the world. Educational programmes that promote the ideal of a sustainable technique and healthy lifestyle for the professional musician of the future are beginning to become integrated into education programs, aiming to raise awareness among students and staff alike. This project examines health and wellbeing provisions and their associated resources currently provided to students in British conservatoires, including how, where, and with what emphasis education in such matters lies. Issues relating to student injury, including treatment pathways and recovery support, are also explored. This is completed through a series of case studies with individual conservatoires and a questionnaire study with conservatoire students.

METHOD

Participants

The study was carried out across seven UK conservatoires, with members of staff from each institution aiding with data collection. The study also questioned a total of 46 student participants from UK conservatoires: 26 male and 20 female participants, with a mean age of 22 years. The students were from both undergraduate and postgraduate courses and played cello, clarinet, flute, horn, oboe, percussion, piano (including two accompanists), saxophone (classical and jazz), trumpet, trombone, tuba, violin, and voice. Twenty-seven participants had experienced an injury, 19 had not, and 15 were currently dealing with an injury.

Materials

Case-studies were compiled on seven British conservatoires, giving a detailed picture of health and wellbeing provisions, each being approached on an individual basis and various departments being asked to describe the health and wellbeing activities taking place.

A self-reporting questionnaire was used to gain an insight into the thoughts and feelings of conservatoire students toward their experiences of health and wellbeing provisions. The questionnaire explored topics such as individual experiences of injury, experiences of health and wellbeing education within their own institution, and the importance of health and wellbeing as a topic.

Procedure

Each institution was approached on an individual basis and case studies were completed with the cooperation of staff members. Since the personal data of students was handled in a variety of different ways, procedure for finding participants and completing the questionnaire was carried out through a variety of methods. Some questionnaires were filled out over the telephone with the researcher taking notes, while others were completed by hand or via email.

RESULTS

This investigation revealed a wide variety of activities, some of which are described below, with conservatoires providing support to students on many levels. One-off workshops were found to be the most common form of health and wellbeing activity, giving students insight into issues ranging from injury prevention to performance anxiety and from hearing health awareness to how to create a healthier lifestyle. Specialist departmental workshops were noted by 45% of students as being particularly successful, and one student commented that “there are fortnightly classes for accompanists where our specific issues can be addressed; I find this really useful.” In three conservatoires, workshops have developed into a regular series of classes.

Three institutions present health and wellbeing issues as a first-year project. As well as addressing practical skills, these classes also focus on academic knowledge, developing professional skills, and addressing performance-practice issues. One participant commented: “I had health and wellbeing education when I was in the first year, but I’ve forgotten everything they’ve said and I know others have too.” Only 43% of participants recognized that health and wellbeing was part of their curriculum.

In four conservatoires, health and wellbeing issues were also found to be raised as a part of larger projects, such as outreach projects and teacher training programs. Conservatoire students are increasingly given the opportunity to pursue academic study of the subject further, with five conservatoires noting an increase in the amount of students choosing health and wellbeing as a topic for dissertation projects. Masters modules and doctoral study in the area is also developing within conservatoires.

Conservatoires also showed diverse support for those who become injured, with a wide range of services for psychological and physical wellbeing, including counseling and physiotherapy and access to information, support, funding, and treatment. However, only 35% of students suggested that they had taken advantage of this. All seven conservatoires provide resources to

support health and wellbeing education, which includes literature, journals, and web-based support. In three conservatoires, internet homepages provide comprehensive information on health and wellbeing activities, while in four conservatoires intranet sites contain notes, recordings, or videos from lectures and workshops. One student commented: "I think it's good that there is so much information on the intranet, and it would be good if all the stuff we learned about was up there so you could look at it again." However, when students were asked if they were aware of who was responsible for health issues within their institution, 43% could name a point of contact.

When asked if they felt that their institutions were doing enough for their health and wellbeing, only 22% responded "yes." However, 93% of students questioned stated that health and wellbeing was important to them, commenting: "if you haven't got your health, you haven't got your career," "when you are healthy you find performing easier and can play to a higher standard," and "awareness of health and wellbeing is essential in order to be able to perform to your best abilities."

DISCUSSION

This investigation has shown that conservatoires provide a wide range of health and wellbeing information to their students through both timetabled provision but also through less formal individual education. Although a wide variety of activities and support for health and wellbeing issues were found to be offered to students, the level, content, and delivery of this provision varied greatly between institutions. Each conservatoire uses the resources and facilities readily available to them and maximizes the use of local specialists and passionate members of staff as driving forces to their work. The services available are therefore reliant on these resources and are influenced by other issues such as timetabling, funding, student support, and logistics. This reveals that, as yet, there is no united front within British conservatoires in disseminating information on health and wellbeing issues to students. This investigation has revealed that students do not feel that they are getting the full benefit of health and wellbeing provisions within their institutions, provoking the questions of whether or not the topic should become an integral part of a curriculum, the extent to which conservatoires should take a proactive role in preventing injury, and the importance of science in a musical setting.

Creating a set of coherent and organized goals for health and wellbeing education would offer both students and staff a more structured approach to an essential topic. Ensuring that students have adequate training in how inju-

ries may be prevented, how they might detect the onset of injury, where they go for treatment of an injury, and how they are supported back to recovery is essential. Having consistency in comprehensive education and injury support would allow students to study in an environment comparatively free of concern over injury and leave their institutions with a set of skills central in a professional career.

Students have expressed within this study their belief in the importance of education in health and wellbeing matters. Students have also stressed the importance of raising awareness of topics relating to injury, including both the prevention and treatment of playing-related disorders. For this kind of information to be successfully interpreted by music students, the role of the one-to-one teacher should be carefully evaluated. Although creating effective learning plans within the curriculum may be very beneficial, it is one-to-one teachers who have the most influence on the practical usage of techniques. Without the involvement of these teachers in health and wellbeing education, the topic may struggle to be translated into useable, practical techniques.

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Address for correspondence

Louise Atkins, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Castle Grounds, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3ER, UK; *Email*: louise.atkins@rwcmd.ac.uk

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