

Could dancing take a turn on the timetable?

● School lessons are targeted as part of drive to shed traditional image

#COUNTRYDANCING

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It has been woven into the cultural fabric of the nation since the 18th century but has fallen out of fashion.

Now a new campaign is being launched to transform the fortunes of Scottish country dancing by ensuring it is part of the school curriculum.

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS), which is leading efforts to secure the future of a once-thriving scene, has admitted it will need to change its image to survive.

And the body, which was formed in 1923 to try to preserve Scottish country dancing, believes future generations of school pupils hold the key.

It wants every primary school in the country to adopt a special "jigs and reels" teaching pack as part of wider efforts to encourage youngsters to adopt a healthier lifestyle and develop an early interest in the arts.

Teachers with no previous experience of dancing are being urged to secure official accreditation from the society as part of its bid to "uphold a tradition that has been exported all over the world."

Anne McArthur, the society's youth services convenor, said: "We are passionate about seeing Scottish country dancing back in the classroom and it's something we are being very active on."

"Our material is already impacting on primary schools across Scotland. Our teachers are going into schools to teach right up to primary seven and it's really encouraging to see that many class teachers are now wanting to run with it and



↑ Bearsden primary schools set an example at the Big Country Dancing Day, which is part of Bearsden Festival.



↑ Carnoustie High School ready to dance at the school prom



↑ Pitreavie primary school pupils take part in a lunch-time disco

applying for accreditation to teach for themselves."

The RSCDS has admitted country dancing has been suffering from "unhelpful perceptions" and is at risk of dying out without a "vibrant community of participants" coming through in future.

It is developing new dances "written by and for young people," staging dedicated events for young dancers and trying to build stronger links with the thriving traditional music scene and events like Celtic Connections.

Blurring of traditional boundaries between formal country dance events and ceilidhs, which are still hugely popular among many students and in traditional music circles, is also seen as key.

Helen Russell, the RSCDS chair elect, added: "Scottish country dancing goes hand in hand with traditional music. As the music evolves and develops, so does the form of dance. There is now a much wider range of both modern compositions and music from other disciplines coming into Scottish country dance and we appreciate the involvement of good young musicians is key to this. We want young people to enjoy and engage in the dancing and music, and to cherish both for future generations."

Mairi Campbell, instrumentalist of the year at the 2015 Scots Trad Music Awards, said: "Young people love the feeling of being connected to their culture, these dances, knowing that they have been around for a long time. The RSCDS has an important role to be keepers of this beautiful form and framework of interaction."

Simon Thounire, founder of the awards, said: "Country dancing is such a world-wide brand for Scotland and the society has done so much to take it to new audiences over the years. I think country dancing now pretty much goes hand in hand with the ceilidh scene here."