

SPELTHORNE GYMNASTICS

ACROBATIC ELITE PROGRAMME

PROTOCOL & INFORMATION for PARENTS

Revision 7a – February 2024



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1.0 GENERAL

- 1.1 The purpose of this Protocol is to inform parents of the requirements and expectations of the coaches and management in relation to fitness, behaviour, training and competitions, before they commit to joining the Acrobatic Elite Programme (Squads 1, 2, 3, and 4). It also provides information about the sport, it's history and how it's organised.
- 1.2 The Acrobatic Elite Programme (AEP) is different from our General Gymnastics Programme because it focuses on acrobatic pair and group work, and competitions at all levels – Regional, National, International, Europeans and Worlds.
- 1.3 Congratulations if your gymnast has been selected to take part in AEP Squads 1, 2, 3, or 4. We hope that he/she will enjoy a successful time and make long lasting friendships with the other gymnasts.
- 1.4 The aim of the AEP as a whole is to prepare gymnasts for the highest levels of competition, so that they fulfil their potential, and also to maintain the reputation and high standards that the Acrobatics section of the Club has achieved since its inception in 1986.

2.0 COMMITMENT

- 2.1 Before we start, let's talk about commitment. Acrobatics is a team sport where team members are not easily or quickly replaceable, and therefore extremely high levels of commitment and dedication are needed from all of the participants: gymnasts, coaches and parents.
- 2.2 When a partnership is formed there will be short and long-term goals in mind, these are normally based around competitions such as Regional, National, European or World Championships. The period between each goal is called a 'training cycle'. If you join the AEP and commit to a goal (the latest 'training cycle'), then we expect you to fulfil your obligation and not give-up beforehand as this is unfair to your partners and the coaches.
- 2.3 In terms of overall progression, each partnership will be allocated a target competition by the coaches which best suits their ability and development. You and your partners must commit to attendance at these competitions because they often form the basis for selection (a) to represent the South East Region or (b) by the National Coach to represent Great Britain at later events. There may be instances when you are given an 'option' whether or not to attend a competition, but this will be on rare occasions. We don't want to commit resources to preparing a partnership for a competition and then find out that, for some reason, one of you cannot compete.

3.0 WHAT IS ACROBATIC GYMNASTICS?

- 3.1 Acrobatics can be traced back to ancient Greece. Modern-day 'Acrobatic Gymnastics' was originally called 'Sports Acrobatics' and began in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. It was introduced to the UK in the 1970's when John Atkinson (British Gymnastics) returned from the 1974 1st World Championships in Moscow where the UK was represented by tumblers only. John was full of enthusiasm for this new and exciting branch of gymnastics, and the first British acrobatic pairs and groups emerged in 1976. In the UK we began competing on the international stage shortly afterwards albeit we were 40 years behind the eastern bloc countries at that stage, and medals were just a dream. It would take until 1988, at the 8th World Championships in Belgium, that the UK would win its first overall world medal (bronze), by Spelthorne gymnasts Alison and Emma. Since then, the UK has produced numerous World and European medallists, many from Spelthorne Gymnastics and too many to mention here, but some are now still coaching in the Club (Adam, Ellie, Leighanne, Emily, and Alison). The FIG (our international governing body) is also pressing for the sport to become part of the Senior Olympic Programme – fingers crossed.
- 3.2 In Acrobatic Gymnastics the gymnasts form partnerships comprising two, three or four athletes. There are five disciplines - men's pairs, women's pairs, mixed pairs, women's group (3) and men's group (4). There are either one, two or three 'base' gymnasts and one 'top' (flier).
- 3.3 In competitions, the partnerships normally have to perform two or three routines to music each lasting about 2 minutes. The routines are named 'Balance', 'Dynamic' and 'Combined'. In some competitions only a Combined exercise is performed.
- 3.4 The total score for each routine is determined by (a) how many mistakes are made (technical mark of 10), (b) the difficulty of the elements (difficulty mark) and (c) the quality of the choreography (artistry mark of 10). A score of 27.50 and above is considered very good.
- 3.5 If you want to see some top-level acrobatic gymnasts look here:

<https://www.fig-gymnastics.com/site/pages/disciplines/pres-acro.php>

4.0 WHAT IS THE ELITE PROGRAMME?

- 4.1 There are two basic training/competition pathways in Acrobatic Gymnastics in the UK:
- 4.1.1 The first is called the National Development Plan (NDP), which is managed by British Gymnastics. It has eight different levels of

performance and its own NDP British Championship at each level. The levels are: Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Youth, IDP 1, IDP 2. There is a minimum age of 9 years in the NDP programme. Gymnasts qualify for the British Championships through a Regional Qualifying competition. Our Region is the South East. Gymnasts who qualify, compete for the South East Region (not Spelthorne Gymnastics) at the NDP British Championships.

- 4.1.2 The second is an International Programme managed by the Federation Internationale Gymnastique (FIG) which focusses on higher levels of performance and therefore requires much higher levels of training. The FIG programme is based upon age groups; 11-16, 12-18, 13-19 (Junior) and 15+ (Senior). Partnerships have to be formed to fit into these age groups. There is also a FIG British Championships where Clubs enter any gymnasts they consider to be suitable.
- 4.2 Our AEP engages with both pathways (NDP and FIG) depending on the ability of the partnership. It is not uncommon for individual gymnasts to transfer back and forth between the two pathways depending upon their circumstances, partners and progress. Transfer is at the discretion of the coaches.
- 4.3 Gymnasts following the FIG pathway who are too young for the 11-16 or 12-18 categories may compete in the IDP1 or IDP2 categories (in the NDP programme) where there are no age restrictions.

5.0 COMPETITIONS

- 5.1 NDP Competitions generally fall into the following categories.
 - 5.1.1 Friendly
 - 5.1.2 Regional
 - 5.1.3 National (British NDP Championships)
- 5.2 FIG Competitions generally fall into the following categories.
 - 5.2.1 Friendly
 - 5.2.2 National Competitions (British FIG Championships)
 - 5.2.3 Trials and Selection Competitions
 - 5.2.4 International Friendly Competitions
 - 5.2.5 European Championships
 - 5.2.6 World Cups & World Games
 - 5.2.7 Youth Olympics

5.2.8 World Championships – Age Groups, Junior and Senior

6.0 TRIAL COMPETITIONS

6.1 Trial competitions are organised by British Gymnastics for selection to represent Great Britain at International events. The BG selection policy changes from time to time but in most cases, selection is at the discretion of the National Coach. Therefore, even if a partnership wins the trial competition/s, the National Coach may decide to take another partnership if he/she thinks they have a better chance of securing medals for Great Britain.

7.0 COMPETITION RESULTS

7.1 Participation in the AEP does not guarantee results. Whilst we have an excellent record, the results depend heavily on the amount of effort the gymnasts put into training and how strong the competition is at any particular time.

8.0 WHAT DOES YOUR GYMNAST NEED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAMME?

8.1 In order to participate in the programme your gymnast will need:

8.1.1 Talent (which we spot).

8.1.2 A good level of fitness.

8.1.3 A good sense of discipline.

8.1.4 An ability to work hard at all times.

8.1.5 A good level of mental strength.

8.1.6 To be prepared to sacrifice other activities in place of training and competitions.

8.1.7 To respect their partners needs and ambitions.

8.1.8 Supportive parents – parental support is crucial to success in this group. The AEP is hard work for the gymnasts, but the rewards are great. You will need to provide support to your gymnasts during the 'low-points' and praise at the 'high points'.

8.2 In order to travel abroad Gymnasts will need:

8.2.1 a **British Passport**. If you do not have a British Passport, you will still be able to compete at the FIG British Championships, but you will not be allowed to represent Great Britain at International Events (FIG Pathway). The FIG Pathway demands that your gymnast has a British Passport. It is therefore imperative that you notify us if you do NOT have a British Passport as soon as you are selected into the AEP

because its main purpose is towards representing Great Britain at International Events. Please note that obtaining a passport can take a long time, and is quite expensive, so the process needs to be started as soon as you start the AEP. If you do not intend to obtain a British Passport for your gymnast, please let us know so that we can arrange suitable partners.

- 8.2.2 Your gymnast will need an ability to manage themselves alone. It is more than likely that, at some time, your gymnast will be travelling abroad and therefore it is important that they are able to look after themselves in basic tasks such as carrying luggage, money management, personal hygiene etc and not rely on your/our support.
- 8.2.3 Parental contact during events - There is a trend nowadays for parents to continuously text their gymnastren to check that they are OK. We understand parent's concerns, however this needs to be kept to an absolute minimum as it distracts the gymnasts from the task in hand and can, in some case, result in your nerves and anxiety being transferred unnecessarily to your gymnast.

9.0 WHAT ARE THE REWARDS FOR PARTICPATING IN THE ELITE PROGRAMME?

- 9.1 The AEP focusses on preparing gymnasts for competition; Regional, National, and International events including European and World Championships with the aim of achieving medals at those events. Gymnasts travel all over the UK/world to compete at these events.
- 9.2 Since 1986, Spelthorne's gymnasts have been winning gold, silver and bronze medals at all of these events, so there is no reason why your gymnast cannot do the same with a lot of hard work, a bit of luck, and a lot of dedication on the part of all concerned, gymnast, coaches and parents.
- 9.3 Partnerships formed in the AEP also form life-long friendships, not only between themselves, but also with other competitors that they meet both home and abroad.
- 9.4 Whilst we have a lot of success in the past, possibly the most of any club in the UK, we've also had failures where gymnasts have not been able to keep to the programme for a variety of reasons. This is to be expected because we cannot guarantee results; we can only see potential in your gymnast and then try to nurture and maximise it.
- 9.5 Taking part in a serious training programme and keeping extremely fit is something that our gymnasts carry through to adult life and therefore has life-long benefits for them.

10.0 SCHOOLWORK

- 10.1 We rarely have any problems with schoolwork. On the contrary, most of our elite gymnasts do very well at school and often improve when they move into an elite training environment. This, we think, is because they have to organise themselves and their schoolwork around their training schedule and therefore, they become very disciplined in both.
- 10.2 There is a dedicated study room at the gym where schoolwork can be completed before or after training. We ask that gymnasts work under 'library' conditions in this room – i.e., absolute quiet.
- 10.3 If you do find that schoolwork is suffering, then please talk to the coaches about it and they can discuss options.

11.0 HOW ARE PARTNERSHIPS FORMED?

- 11.1 Partnerships are formed by the coaches based upon a range of factors such as age (to fit within the NDP & FIG age categories), size, fitness, maturity, technical ability, strength, work ethic etc.
- 11.2 Trial Partnerships - Sometimes partnerships are formed on a 'trial' basis because we are not sure if the partnership will work. We will let you know if it's a 'trial partnership'.
- 11.3 Long Term Partnerships - Some partnerships may be formed on a 'long term' basis, meaning that they may be 'out of age' for a period of time. Others may be formed on a 'training' basis whilst more suitable partners are found.

12.0 WHEN AND WHY ARE PARTNERSHIPS CHANGED?

- 12.1 Possibly one the most misunderstood aspects of Acrobatic Gymnastics is the fact that gymnasts do not progress 'linearly' and will often need to 'step back' to form new partnerships, sometimes at a lower level. Parents frequently misinterpret this as a backward step, which it is not. It is a function of the way partnerships are formed and the fact that performance is determined by the whole partnership and not the individual gymnasts.
- 12.2 Partnerships often change when a 'top' decides to become a 'base' and therefore needs to learn a completely new skill set. If you speak to any of our previous senior gymnasts, they will confirm that they had several 'step backs' before they reached their full potential – it is normal, so please don't panic when it happens.
- 12.3 Partnerships may also change from time to time if the gymnasts are not working well together, or they out-grow each other, or one retires, or they are not maintaining the required level of fitness, or we feel there is little/no

chance of achieving medals due to a lack of technical execution, difficulty or artistry.

- 12.4 If your gymnast loses a partner, he/she may remain on the EAP while we look for another suitable partner. There are plenty of training activities that your gymnast can do in the interim period that will enhance his/her performance. Training does not stop or slow down in these circumstances. We focus on improving the weak points so that their individual capabilities improve.
- 12.5 Unfortunately, in some situations, it may be difficult to find another suitable partner and we may try advertising to see if there are suitable partners outside the club in a similar situation who would like to form a partnership.

13.0 PREPAREDNESS FOR TRAINING

- 13.1 Elite training requires a high level of discipline, concentration and effort. It's therefore important that the gymnasts arrive at each training session in a good level of preparedness: mentally, physically and attired. Gymnasts must therefore:
 - 13.1.1 Arrive on time. This means ready to line-up and start warming up at the class start time. We recommend arriving 10 mins beforehand.
 - 13.1.2 Arrive in suitable training clothing – a leotard, lycra shorts, tight fitting top etc. Revealing clothing is not allowed. Clothing must be supportive.
 - 13.1.3 Arrive fresh and ready to train. Gymnasts should ensure they have had sufficient sleep the night before training – tired gymnasts cannot react as quickly and therefore pose a risk to their partners.
 - 13.1.4 Long hair must be tied into a neat, tidy and secure bun – we don't want to waste valuable time re-tying a gymnast's hair.
 - 13.1.5 Gymnasts should notify their coaches of any injuries or reasons why they are not able to train fully – i.e., sickness, tiredness, injury etc.
- 13.2 Gymnasts are required to provide their own chalk, and from 13th February 2023 this must be the liquid type (not the dusty calcium carbonate – which damages our vacuum cleaners and air filtering equipment).

14.0 FITNESS

- 14.1 It goes without saying that elite athletes need to be extremely fit to be able to train safely and effectively. There is no half-way house. It is not fair on the other members of a partnership if one member is lazy and/or unfit.

- 14.2 We use the term 'fitness' to cover a number of attributes such as; strength, flexibility and overall body condition; all of which combine to make an elite gymnast.
- 14.2.1 'Base' gymnasts need to be strong and powerful in order to throw the tops as high as possible and to balance them in difficult pyramids.
- 14.2.2 'Top' gymnasts need to be smaller but also incredibly strong so that they can be thrown high into the air and also hold difficult handstand shapes, often just on one arm.
- 14.2.3 All gymnasts need to maintain a level of fitness that enables them to manoeuvre and control their bodies with ease. Tops are often thrown high in the air and bases have to catch them, both of which require high levels of concentration and strength. A healthy diet is mandatory to ensure gymnasts have adequate levels of consistent energy, and their brains are fuelled effectively for the amount of concentration needed in sessions.
- 14.3 In Acrobatics, the weight ratio of the partners is very important as this normally determines the level of difficulty that the partnership can achieve and therefore the overall 'difficulty score' that is possible. The difficulty score is critical in senior events as there is no cap on the difficulty value (the sum of all the elements performed) or the final score. It is therefore absolutely imperative that all gymnasts (and their parents) in the AEP treat fitness as a matter of priority.
- 14.4 Health and fitness are also key aspects of safety:
- 14.4.1 This means that gymnasts will need to maintain lifestyle habits that are as healthy and balanced as possible to be competitive. It will also require a large amount of parental support, and this may require whole family lifestyle changes in order to be effective.
- 14.4.2 We are often asked what, and how much, food gymnasts should eat. We are not qualified dieticians, but we can offer basic dietary advice if you are not sure what this entails. We definitely do not recommend following any 'fad-diets'; we do recommend a healthy well-balanced diet with sensible portion control. The importance of healthy eating and the impact on the body as a whole is critical in elite sport. This includes the impact of processed and sugary foods on levels of concentration. We want all gymnast's bodies and brains to be functioning at their best during training. The food they choose to eat determines the functioning of the brain, energy levels and mood all of which are vital in high level athletes.

- 14.5 Parents will be advised if there are any issues arising concerning fitness. Equally, if you have concerns or questions relating to health and fitness, please do not hesitate to contact our welfare officer.

15.0 WELFARE

- 15.1 The welfare of all gymnasts at Spelthorne Gymnastics is a priority. All gymnasts/parents are encouraged to speak to any of our welfare officers if they have any concerns.
- 15.2 In addition, our Welfare Manager tries to meet once or twice per year with gymnasts to discuss training and any questions or issues that they may have with regards to welfare.
- 15.3 If you have any welfare concerns, there is a 'welfare box' in the corridor opposite the girls toilets.

16.0 TRAINING SCHEDULE, ATTENDANCE & PUNCTUALITY

- 16.1 The coaches will provide you with a detailed training schedule that is suitable for your gymnast's level of competition.
- 16.2 Your gymnast will be expected to attend all training sessions other than in exceptional circumstances such as illness. If your gymnast is going to be late or miss a session, please email the coaches on.
- 16.2.1 Squad 1 - eliteacro@spelthornegymnastics.com
- 16.2.2 Squad 2 - info@spelthornegymnastics.com
- 16.2.3 Squad 3 - info@spelthornegymnastics.com
- 16.2.4 Squad 4 - info@spelthornegymnastics.com
- 16.3 Your gymnast should aim to arrive at the gym at least **10 minutes** before the start time to allow them to get changed etc.
- 16.4 If there is too much absence from training (below 95%), then participation in the AEP may be terminated and you will be given the opportunity to take part in the General Gymnastics Programme which is less demanding programme.

17.0 HOLIDAYS

- 17.1 Your coach/s will advise you of the competition calendar for each year as soon as they are aware of it. This often depends upon how quickly British Gymnastics publicise their competition calendar and when/if we receive international invitations.

- 17.2 Your coach will advise you of the best periods in which to take holidays in order to minimise disruption to the training schedule and to maximise performance in competition.
- 17.3 Holidays are normally allowed immediately after main competitions or during periods of low competition activity. Your coach will advise you of this.
- 17.4 Taking holiday outside the dates advised by the coaches will (a) be unfair on the remaining partners, (b) show disrespect to the training programme and its aims (c) result in a deterioration in performance of the partnership and (d) if serious, will result in removal from the Elite FIG Pathway.
- 17.5 Holidays cannot be taken at any time in the three months before National Championships, European Championships or World Championships because this period is critical to the build-up to peak-performance. Absence in this period seriously disrupts the training programme and performance and is (a) unfair on other members of the partnership and (b) disrupts the coach's plans.

18.0 LEOTARDS AND CLOTHING

- 18.1 Clothing for events where the gymnasts represent the Club is paid for by the gymnast/parent. Occasionally, for special events, the Club may provide some elements of clothing, but this is at the discretion of the Club at the time.
- 18.2 For events where the gymnast is representing Great Britain, usually only the Senior athletes get clothing provided by British Gymnastics. All other age groups have to buy the clothing themselves.
- 18.3 Generally, the gymnasts wear a different leotard for each of the routines. Leotards can be expensive, depending upon the manufacturer and detail in the design. We are trying to persuade British Gymnastics and FIG to place less emphasis on flamboyant leotards to reduce cost. Leotards can be sold when no longer needed and this helps to recoup some of the cost.

19.0 COMMUNICATION

- 19.1 When the gymnasts start their first year of senior school (age 11) we expect them to be able to manage themselves and communicate directly with the coaches and pass information back to their parents.
- 19.2 If you still need to ask a question from any of the elite coaching team, you can email them using the addresses above (para 16.2).
- 19.3 Please don't try to talk to the coaches during training times as this disrupts the session for others. If you feel you need to meet the coach/s face to face, then use the email address to book an appointment.

19.4 Please don't ask questions to the main reception staff with regards to the elite programme because they have to disrupt the session to find an answer for you.

20.0 REPORTS

20.1 Every six months you will receive a written report showing your gymnasts progress with comments from the coaches with regards to their performance, effort, attitude, attendance, sportsmanship etc.

21.0 INJURIES

21.1 Injuries are part of sport and can happen at any time. We expect the gymnasts to be able to communicate with the coaches if they are injured or unwell. If you are aware that your gymnast is injured, then please ensure they speak to the coach before training starts.

21.2 When an injury occurs to a gymnast on the AEP our aim is to return the gymnast to full training as quickly and safely as possible. It is therefore imperative that the parent obtains a specialist (GP referred) diagnosis of the injury immediately and a recommended treatment process. If this involves physiotherapy, this must be carried out without delay and we leave this to the parents to arrange. We will adapt the training programme to adopt the specialist's recommendations.

21.3 For most of the injuries that we encounter, there is not normally any reason to miss training. The training programme can be adapted so that the gymnast learns other skills and maintains a level of fitness.

22.0 ATTITUDE, BEHAVIOUR & WORK ETHIC

22.1 Your gymnast will be expected to maintain a high standard of behaviour and discipline at all times. This includes behaviour towards staff, coaches and other members of the acrobatic partnership and all other members of the Club.

22.2 Bullying and/or disrespecting other members of the Club will not be tolerated.

22.3 Your gymnast will also be expected to maintain a high work rate/ethic.

23.0 BEHAVIOUR AT COMPETITIONS

23.1 Your gymnast will be expected to maintain a high standard of behaviour and discipline at competitions and will be expected to sign the relevant Travel Code of Conduct. This includes behaviour towards organisers, staff, coaches, other competitors and other members of the acrobatic partnership.

23.2 Communicating with your gymnast during a competition, be it at home or abroad, is most likely to distract them from the task in hand. If you are attending an event as a spectator then, in our experience, it is better that you remain in the background and simply spectate so that the gymnast can follow the coach's instructions and not be drawn away from the team. If you feel you must communicate with your gymnast, then please do this through the coach or support staff and not directly to the gymnast.

24.0 REMOVAL FROM THE ELITE PATHWAY

24.1 Your gymnast may be removed from the Elite Pathway if:

24.1.1 Attendance falls below 95%.

24.1.2 Holiday is taken outside the coaches notified dates.

24.1.3 The Gymnast's conduct either in or outside the gym is not conducive to remaining in the programme – at the coach's discretion.

24.1.4 The gymnasts/parent falls behind with payment of fees.

24.1.5 The gymnast's level of fitness falls below that required by the coaches or jeopardises the safe performance of elements.

24.1.6 The gymnasts discipline or work rate is not conducive to elite training.

24.1.7 The gymnast shows a behaviour or training trait that we consider to be dangerous to either themselves or their partners. An example of this would be failing to catch a partner on a number of occasions or showing a lack of concern for the safety of their partners.

24.2 In the event a gymnast leaves the AEP they will be offered a place on another programme which is more suitable for them.

25.0 FEES, CHOREOGRAPHY & COMPETITION EXPENSES

25.1 Training fees are payable monthly by direct debit and are averaged to cover all the training sessions for the year. So, you pay the same amount every month even though the number of training sessions in the month may vary when there are holiday breaks etc.

25.2 Choreography costs are extra to the normal training fees. You will be asked to pay for the initial routine creation by a choreographer. This involves the choreographer finding and cutting music (unless you provide it yourself) and then creating a routine for the partnership; this normally takes a day or two. Once this has been completed, the routine is cleaned and practiced as part of the normal training. We may decide to use our own staff for choreography, or we may employ a consultant choreographer if necessary. In both cases we

may arrange extra training sessions for this to be done during school holidays and in a quiet environment. The choreography cost may be reduced if the routine has already been created for another partnership and handed down, or if one of the gymnasts has already paid for the routine with different partners. It can be normal practice for old routines to be learnt via video by the gymnasts before a coach or choreographer works with the gymnasts to finalise the routine.

25.3 Gymnasts/Parents have to meet all competition/clothing expenses themselves.

26.0 FUNDRAISING

26.1 Spelthorne Fundraising Group may decide to provide some financial assistance for certain events. This will be notified by them at the time and will depend on the funds they have available.

26.2 As your gymnast will be eligible for financial support from the Fundraising Group, we expect all parents of AEP gymnasts to be actively supporting the Group in whatever way they can.

27.0 OTHER DOCUMENTS YOU SHOULD READ

27.1 The other **important documents** you should also be familiar with are:

27.1.1 Travel Codes of Conduct for under 18's and over 18's.

27.1.2 Code of Conduct for Squad Parents

27.1.3 Code of Conduct for Squad Gymnasts

27.1.4 Code of Conduct for Coaches, Judges and Volunteers

27.1.5 Code of Conduct for Gymnasts Travelling Abroad

27.2 If you need a copy of any of these documents, you will find them on our website or you can request a copy by emailing us on info@spelthornegymnastics.com

28.0 FURTHER QUESTIONS?

28.1 If you have further questions relating to this document, you can email us on info@spelthornegymnastics.com quoting the reference 'Elite Acro Protocol for Parents' and we will respond as soon as we can. We will also make sure any answers are, if necessary, communicated to everyone.

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