Balancing act
A gymnastic activities core task for key stage 2 children

You need:
- mats and a variety of low and high/large apparatus (eg movement tables, benches and frames) grouped in different combinations
- a video camera and playback equipment (this is optional, but it is useful to record the children’s first and then later attempts at the core task to show their progress)
- TOP Gymnastics cards or similar resources (optional).

What is the core task?
The ‘Balancing act’ core task involves children creating a gymnastic sequence with six actions on floor, mats and apparatus.

After an initial attempt at the core task, the children develop their sequence on floor and mats, before adapting it to apparatus. The sequence should focus on small body part balances linked through travelling, rolling and jumping, and must show different levels and a change in direction.

How are the children doing? Look out for them:
- showing a variety of balances on small body parts
- devising a sequence with a beginning, middle and end
- including different levels, speeds and directions
- repeating the sequence accurately
- performing with control and accuracy
- moving smoothly from one action to another
- varying the use of apparatus (along, over, onto, off)
- describing sequences and gymnastic actions

To help the children evaluate and improve their core task performance, ask them:
- Can you describe the differences between your sequence and someone else’s in the class?
- What is most effective about your friend’s performance? Why?
- What is most effective about your own performance? Why?
- How do you think you could improve your performance? What would you need to do?
- How has your performance improved since you first tried the core task?

To make the task easier or harder, consider changing one or more STEP: Space Task Equipment People
Balancing act: development activities

After the children’s initial attempt at the task, you will know what they can do, how well they can do it, and what they need to work at. To help all of them make progress and achieve in different areas, choose from the activities suggested here and add some of your own.

Developing skills

Balances on small body parts
- Teach the children small body part balances using combinations of hands, feet, elbows, knees and head. Teach them how to extend their toes, legs, arms and increase the tension in their body.
- Ask the children to try a balance where their feet are higher than their head (e.g. a headstand with two hands and head making a triangular base).
- Help the children to perform the balances using apparatus.
- Ask them to select three balances, varying the number of body parts used and levels.

Travelling and balances
- Ask the children to travel using the same small body parts that they used when balancing (e.g. three hands and one foot – one-footed bunny hop).

Actions and apparatus
- Remind the children how to roll, jump and travel in different ways. Ask them to concentrate on different levels and directions.
- Ask the children to transfer these actions to apparatus. Talk with them about which pieces of apparatus are good for rolling, travelling and jumping along, off or over.

Making and applying decisions

Entrances and exits
- Teach the children about entrances and exits – how to transfer body weight into or out of balances so that other actions can be performed (e.g. a three-point balance with head lower than feet could lead into a forward roll). Ask them to explore different combinations.
- Help the children to perform these linked actions using apparatus, thinking about changing levels and directions.

Devising sequences
- Talk with the children about how to devise a sequence, how to make it interesting and exciting for an audience, and how to make it even (e.g. balance into action, balance, action). Help them to adapt their sequence for different apparatus combinations.
- Ask them to write down their sequence and to repeat it until they can remember it accurately.
- Ask them to teach their sequence to a partner. Encourage them to think about how they could adapt their sequence for a partner to copy.

Developing physical and mental capacity

Breathing rates
- Ask the children to count the number of breaths they take in 15 seconds. Then ask them to run very fast on the spot for 15 seconds before counting the number of breaths they take again. Talk with them about why their breathing changes (the need for more oxygen).
- Repeat this activity with heart rates and discuss the results (heart rate increases to pump more blood carrying oxygen to muscles).
- Repeat this activity with body temperature and discuss the results.

Fitness for gymnastics
- Show the children pictures of top gymnasts in balances. Talk with them about which parts of the body need to be supple and strong for gymnastics.

Safe practice
- Help the children to lift, carry and use apparatus safely.
- Help them to share and use space safely.

Evaluating and improving

Look at photographs or video of the children performing different balances. What needs to be improved? What do you need to change or practise to improve your balance?

Ask the children to observe others performing sequences. Can you name the actions you saw? How was each action performed? Can you provide a running commentary on the sequence? How many body parts were used in balances?

In pairs, ask the children to take it in turns to perform their sequence twice and to observe their partner’s performance. Was the sequence the same both times? What was good and not so good about the sequence?

Ask the children to describe how to lift, carry and use apparatus safely.
This chart shows how the new gymnastics core tasks relate to the existing core tasks in the QCA/DCSF schemes of work for gymnastic activities. It presents a visual snapshot of the pitch and challenge of different tasks, enabling you to track and plan pupils’ progress in gymnastics.