

PLEASE RESTORE THE PERMANENT TRADITIONAL DOJO

As a service to current and future students we request that the Students' Union restores the permanent traditional Dojo to the Bloomsbury Fitness Centre. We request that this is done this summer, to be completed by the new academic year, in September 2014. The traditional dojo was demolished in December 2013 without a valid assessment of usage and therefore without justification and replaced by an **unsatisfactory multi-purpose room**. The traditional Dojo has been a distinctive cultural asset for the BF and UCL Union. It has played an important role in many students' experience at UCL. It has housed many diverse activities and facilitated students' training, development and sporting achievement.

We understand that it is one of the responsibilities of the Bloomsbury Fitness Manager to accurately brief UCLU on purpose and usage of facilities in the BF. Judging by the reasons the new BF Manager gave to Dojo users in his email of 2 January 2014 (see below and Appendix 2) for the demolition of the permanent Dojo, he has demonstrated his:

- Lack of understanding of the uses and function of the permanent Dojo.
- Failure to conduct a proper assessment of the actual usage of the Dojo.
- Bias in favour of one Club / one set of users, i.e. Squash, while he has disregarded, disadvantaged and in some cases, displaced, the Dojo users. There was no consultation with Dojo Clubs and individual users, who were kept in the dark. On the other hand, discussions had taken place with the Squash Club over some time. **Reported demand for Squash was exaggerated: Free morning Squash is an indicator of low demand for Squash.**

Thus, if the BF Manager passed on the same reasons (as in his above-mentioned email of 2/1/14) to the sabbatical student officers who approved the removal, those officers were given information that was incomplete and misleading. If this is so, the officers were briefed of the case for increasing facilities for Squash but not of the case for retaining, let alone extending and improving facilities for the martial arts and the many other Dojo users.

Permanent Traditional Dojo: Function and Use. 'Warm-Up Room'.

A traditional dojo offers a different environment to the gym floor and the aerobics studio and so helps to attract more students to take up physical activity. Many activities that now take place in the Dojo cannot have been foreseen by those who commissioned the original Judo Room. There is no guessing what opportunities a permanent Dojo will provide for future students.

- The Dojo has **always been a multi-activities room** (see Appendix 1). Additionally, since the 'Phase 1' gym expansion of 2003, the re-located traditional Dojo took on the combined role of Dojo and 'Warm-Up Room' when the space occupied by the latter was taken over by the extended Fitness Suite. Note that since 'Phase 2' (2010) the stretch area on the gym floor gets badly overcrowded, emphasizing the continuing need for this combined role.
- It is a place in which students have the opportunity to try out and practice many **different activities for which protected floor and walls are needed**. Activities not only include the expanding realm of **Martial Arts** but also, more recently, a variety of **acrobatic activities**. Additionally there are the activities which were previously carried out in the old **Warm-Up Room, i.e. fitness conditioning, warm-up/cool-down/stretching**.
- It is a **valuable space for individual and small group skills training as well as for holding small classes**. It is used by members of the many small clubs whose classes are held in the dojo; members of large clubs, e.g. Jitsu, Judo whose classes are in the Studio; and by any individual BF members. It is used for skills training (breakfalls, knee walking, techniques, kata etc.), conditioning training, grading preparation, events preparation (competitions, demonstrations), stretching, etc.
- The permanent Dojo **was being used a lot**. It was **possible for small groups of students to organise themselves for training on an ad hoc basis**. It was possible for individuals to fit in some skills training with a fitness training session in the gym.
- **Martial arts achievements**: Much time must be devoted to training to develop high levels of skill. UCL is proud of its students and alumni who have achieved high awards in sports. It is now time to recognise martial arts achievements and the role of the permanent Dojo in facilitating this. Many students and alumni have achieved grades, including higher degrees of black belt, and teaching ranks thanks to the **opportunity the permanent dojo has afforded for daily practice**.

Effects of the Loss of the Permanent Dojo

Present and future students, alumni and BF members are being potentially deprived of opportunities to study such interesting, diverse disciplines.

- The loss of the permanent Dojo has severely curtailed individual and small group training. Many individuals no longer have anywhere to train within the UCL campus.
- The loss affects the ability of students to achieve high standards of development and their training goals.
- The loss is a threat to the continuity of many small clubs and classes and a serious obstacle to the start-up of new ones.
- Shifting many heavy mats before and after a class or a brief training session is a disincentive for small groups and especially beginners.
- The multi-purpose room arrangements are unsatisfactory and problematical (see Practical Problems document and Appendix). A permanent Dojo can accommodate many activities. However, to attempt to superimpose Squash and Dojo on the same space does not make sense.

Removal of Dojo Wholly Unjustified and a Waste of Resources

The reason given by the BF Manager (email of 2/1/14) to Dojo-using Clubs to justify the removal of the Dojo was that the Squash Club had been demanding more court time. He assessed Dojo usage by adding up the number of hours it was being used for classes only for “about 3 hours a day”, according to him.

In the light of the above-given information, this assessment, based on counting class hours, can be seen to be spurious and biased:

1. The function of the Dojo is not solely for holding classes. It has a significant role as a space for small group and individual specialised training and also as the replacement ‘Warm-up Room’. Any real method of assessment of Dojo usage must take this into account and be capable of monitoring this.
2. If the new BF Manager was of the opinion that the Dojo was underused, it is his job to achieve potential usage: i.e. to replace or organise new classes when existing class instructors move on; to make new gym users aware via signage that they can use the dojo for stretching etc. New classes have, this academic year, been introduced in the morning to the Studio and Spin Zone. Why not the Dojo? Has there been a deliberate attempt to create an impression that the room is redundant?

Further to this:

1. What hard evidence is there of actual as opposed to alleged increased Squash usage by UCL students?
2. The demand for Squash was exaggerated. Since the introduction of the m-p room, **Squash continues to be free in the morning – indicating continuing low demand** (free squash in the morning was introduced around 2005 because the usage of the two courts was almost nil in the mornings). It is unusual for 3 squash courts to be in use at the same time. Court B (previously the permanent Dojo) stood empty for much of Term 2 of 2014 because newly laid plaster was coming off a wall. There did not appear to be any urgency to repair it.
3. **Two people have exclusive use for Squash of a room that could accommodate 10-20 members or gym machines.**

Bias has been shown in favour of one club, the Squash Club, giving Squash preferential treatment while the many Dojo Clubs and Dojo users’ needs have been ignored. This is not in the spirit of UCLU’s ethos of equal opportunities.

In the first instance we ask for the restoration of the Dojo, this summer, to be completed before the start of the new academic year in September 2014. As a future development, we would like to see UCL offer its students bigger and more modern martial arts facilities.