

COMMENT ON “SUSPENSION” LETTER FROM BJA

BY BERNARD RICHMOND KC, CHAIR BJC HEADQUARTER’S COMMITTEE

The BJC is an organisation which strives to ensure that judo is an inclusive and rewarding experience for all members and the wider judo community, regardless of background or income.

We have enjoyed the cordial and mutually beneficial relationship which we have had with BJA members since the affiliation agreement was signed, nearly 30 years ago. We earnestly hope that any obstacle to the continuation of this relationship is removed as soon as possible.

The effect of this suspension is to block participation to over 4,000 people who enjoy judo. They are not interested in judo politics and they will be dismayed that they are not permitted to practise judo with their friends in the BJA (without buying a second licence – which many cannot afford).

We too are bemused by the current stance of the BJA Board.

Let there be no doubt. **The BJC will continue to welcome BJA members to our clubs, courses and events. If you are prohibited from engaging with us, you must look to your own Board, not us.**

On the **27th June 2024**, I received (via Email), a copy of a letter, signed by Andrew Scoular, on behalf of the BJA Board. The text of the letter is reproduced in full below.

As a result of this letter, I contacted our office (and, thereafter, interrupted our Chief Executive’s holiday, to double-check the information contained therein). The **reality** is that, regarding applications from Scottish clubs, we have had just **one** application to join the BJC. This application is from a **brand new (i.e. just opened) club** which has, therefore, never been a BJA member. The instructor concerned has passed all safeguarding checks and is appropriately qualified.

There are **no** problems with our coaching qualifications (which the BJA have a detailed knowledge of and about which they have never expressed any concern) and there is **no** issue with our safeguarding processes.

Sadly, there is **another** quite different inference to be drawn from these events.

The Affiliation agreement does not contain any review clause. It is not a fixed term agreement and it has been amended only once in 30 years. Mr Scoular has been pressing me for a meeting (which we undertake periodically), which he informed

me was about the affiliation agreement. When pressed further, he explained that the BJA wished to double the fee paid by the BJC, per member, for affiliation.

I informed Mr Scoular that I would have to discuss this issue with my committee at our next meeting in June. I indicated that he should not assume that we would be receptive to the suggestion. I was anticipating inviting him to meet with me in July. I trust that neither he nor the Board have interpreted my delay in organising the meeting, due solely to pressure of work, as any discourtesy.

A cynical interpretation of this suspension is that it is a clumsy attempt to force us around the table and to create pressure on us to accept the BJA fee proposal. A further cynical interpretation is that the BJA are seeking to put pressure on their clubs in Scotland, with a veiled threat to discredit them if they do not comply with BJA demands. The effect on the BJC is “collateral damage”, which the BJA board are prepared to accept in order to get their way.

Whatever the motivation, the suspension (for the reasons given) does not hold water. It is an unwarranted and unfair attack on the integrity of the BJC and, importantly, the personal integrity and reputation of those of us on the BJC Headquarters Committee with responsibility for ensuring standards.

Moreover, it highlights a problem which I have regularly highlighted to the BJA. A governing body for a sport **cannot** have a conflict of interest by also being a **membership** body. We are no longer in the 1970s. We live a world where anti-competitive practices are illegal and those who purport to exercise governance have to do so fairly, proportionately and democratically, with representation from all sections of their membership.

The BJC should not have to **affiliate** to a membership organisation. We are entitled to be **full members** of a governing body. We do not seek to press this issue on the basis that the BJA has acted in good faith and maintained some degree of respect for our position and, importantly because 99% of judoka just want to get on with judo without politics. However, bullying has no place in judo.

Our preferred course is for the letter of suspension to be revoked, for the BJA and BJC representatives to meet and for our mutual commitment to judo in the UK to bring us together. I have always enjoyed a cordial relationship with the BJA board members and their Chief Executives, including Mr Scoular. I am committed to maintaining this position.

TEXT OF LETTER FROM BJA TO THE BJC

27 June 2024

Bernard Richmond KC
Chair, British Judo Council
37 High Street
Stalham
Norfolk
NR12 9AH

By Email

Dear Bernard

British Judo Council Affiliation to British Judo

I trust that you are well.

We were informed that you had your Executive Committee Meeting on Friday 14 June where you would be reviewing the draft revised Affiliation Agreement sent to you. I was just wondering if there was any feedback following that meeting?

Myself and Karen Roberts are keen to meet with you face to face to facilitate the sign off of a revised Affiliation Agreement. I would be grateful if you could provide me with some potential dates for this over the next couple of weeks for us to check. We are of course happy to travel to London.

However, it was raised at our Board Meeting on Tuesday 18 June that there are several clubs moving from Judo Scotland to BJC, that may not be operating within the standards that have been produced in consultation with our partners and affiliates of which BJC was one. The information on this can be found here: <https://www.britishjudo.org.uk/three-step-safe/>.

At this meeting the Board took the decision that I should instruct you that given that our current affiliation agreement has expired and that we cannot confirm that BJC clubs are operating within the required standards, we would suspend the agreement, commencing Monday 1 July. BJC members already registered for British Judo competitions will be allowed to compete, but no new registrations would be accepted again as of Monday 1 July, until such time that we all have the confidence that the standards are being adhered to and a new affiliation agreement has been signed. We will also be writing to our clubs to inform them of this.

I am of course keen to rectify this situation as soon as possible and look forward to hearing from you in regard to a meeting.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Scoular
Chief Executive