

Kendo Bu Strategy: Discussion points for 2011

Background

The way in which Kendo Bu events are organized and the kind of events run has remained largely unchanged for many years. The Bu officers have discussed changes to this existing practice and concluded that the AGM is the time and place to start a public discussion on strategy for 2011 and beyond. Rather than the Bu discussing ideas internally and producing a single strategy document it was agreed that each Bu officer would document their thoughts for general discussion by the membership. This document was written by the Kendo Bu Events officer, Derek Jones.

Without knowing the strategy for 2011 it is not possible to create a sensible budget. If the strategy chosen is similar to that for 2010 then the membership fee needed would be similar to that for this year, i.e., £27.

Developing Kendo in the UK

In the past the Bu has tended to micromanage events and the public face of the Kendo; if we are to grow this has to stop. Micromanaging demotivates many of those involved, making them less likely to want to be involved in the future. The Bu is a voluntary organization and we should encourage members to contribute their ideas and time to all our activities.

The target audience for this strategy document are those members who are the backbone of the Bu, that is those who run dojos and teach.

To raise the standard of Kendo in the UK at least two things need to happen at the national level:

1) **Increase funding.** The only reliable way to consistently increase the amount of money available within the Bu is to significantly increase membership; membership of the Bu has hovered around 1,000 for the last five years (the recession does not seem to have noticeably affected membership numbers). Both France and Italy have a similarly sized population to the UK and have many more practicing Kendoka. Experience has shown that as a minority activity it is very difficult to obtain sponsorship. Dojos are the public face of the Bu and we should actively help dojo management to attract and keep new members.

Increased funding would enable us to fund Japanese teachers to visit either more frequently or to stay for more than an extended weekend. In the past funding for a National Coach has required around £30,000 per year and was only possible through partial funding via a £10 levy and spending money in the BKA reserve fund. A substantial increase in membership is needed before it becomes viable to fund such a post again.

Another funding option is to change the costing of seminars from a break-even basis to making a significant surplus (i.e, profit). Both Iai and Jodo obtain most of their income in this way, rather than from membership fee; for instance the July 2009 Chiba sensei seminar turned over around £9,000 while the Iai seminar at the same location a few weeks later turned over £100,000 and had a £20,000 surplus (this was achieved by charging significantly more and having significantly more people attend with attendees taking it in turns to have use of the floor space).

2) **Running more events.** The non-grading seminars organized by the Bu currently have places

for around 200 people, which means at most 20% of our 1,000 members get to attend a seminar every year. The Intensive training seminars attract 30-35 people every month, but these tend to be our younger members.

Running more events, taught by either senior BKA members or senior kendoka from other countries, provides more opportunities for more members to improve the quality of their Kendo as well as proving teaching ideas for dojo leaders.

As a volunteer organization the time of the Kendo Bu officers is completely taken up by organizing the current calendar of four refereeing seminars, six gradings most of which have an associated seminar the day before, three taikai and several Japanese sensei seminars; just running these existing events would not be possible without a significant amount of help from local organizers.

The gap between membership numbers and seminar places can only be filled if many more dojos organize and run events. The Event support fund is an initiative started this year intended to encourage dojos to organize events attended by both their members and members from other dojos; it is hoped that over time some of these events will become as well known and attended as the Watchet or Stoke seminars.

Maintaining the status quo

Gradings are a core Bu activity and a roster of members suitably qualified to sit on grading panels has to be maintained.

For many years a small number of senior grades have traveled the country sitting on grading panels (there are four gradings in 2010 at nidan and above). Increasing the pool of members qualified to sit on grading panels is an urgent priority and this year a grading panelist training scheme was initiated. The Bu needs to train and maintain a pool of at least 10 or so members who can grade to up to 3rd Dan. While the percentage of members wanting to grade at 4th Dan and above is very small these people form the backbone of the Bu in terms of dojo management and refereeing. We need to find a long term solution to being able to offer gradings at a senior level.

Like grading panels, for many years refereeing was dominated by a small number of senior Kendoka traveling the country to attend taikai, resulting in refereeing experience being concentrated in a small group of people. To create a broader base of refereeing expertise 3rd, 4th and 5th Dan members need to be actively encouraged to referee.