What have you done to my squash courts!

Jon Turner

I'm a keen squash player. Some years ago, the University of Edinburgh Sport & Exercise Pleasance Complex closed four squash courts and replaced them with a gym full of running machines, training bikes, etc. I was very cross, as were lots of the folk I play squash with – lots of whom are male and heading towards middle age and beyond. Many of us made our displeasure known – something that must have been uncomfortable for Sport & Exercise as we were long-term members and several of us have managerial/leadership roles in different parts of the University.

Now, more than ten years later, the Sport & Exercise gym is usually pretty full and I've noticed that lots of the users (perhaps about half) are women and younger than the old squash demographic. There are also lots more people using the gym space than used to use the four squash courts.

The Sport & Exercise management were absolutely right in identifying that a change in space usage would have a profound positive impact on reaching more people and in reaching a group who, at that stage, were under-represented in their membership (female students). They were also absolutely right to ignore the representations of the older, predominantly male, previous users of that space. I don't know if Sport & Exercise were primarily motivated by gender equality, but this was certainly a positive result. And yes, I do still play squash at Sport & Exercise, and I now use the running machines and bike trainers as well!

Ingredients

- Indignation (use VERY sparingly).
- Persistence.
- Open-mindedness.
- Ability to see the bigger picture.

Method

This recipe is about change – reacting to it, understanding it (however reluctantly at first!) and embracing it. Seeing how it worked, not just for my own benefit, but for the benefit of the wider University community.

1. Take a large dollop of indignation, then discard all but a tiny pinch of it.
2. Take a deep breath, and then another, deeper one.
3. Persist in using the available facilities rather than going off in a huff.

The next method step is what I wish had happened, rather than what actually did:

4. Ask the management what their thinking is behind the proposed changes, and how they intend to manage the transition for existing and potential members.

And the last bit is what is happening now...

5. Enjoy the added facilities and carry on playing squash!