

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

## **Prayer Room Campaign 2005/06**

### **Does the Need Exist?**

The lack of a prayer room at the university is proving highly inconvenient and disruptive for students. Many students have reported that they are having to miss lectures or leave classes early to go home to prayer, not only is this hindering the fulfillment of religious obligations but is also proving highly disruptive to their study schedules.

The fulfilment of prayers is a fundamental tenant of the Islamic faith. Cardiff University is not only responsible for its students' education but also their general welfare.

As Muslims we pray 5 times a day,

- Fajr/Dawn prayer: It is the first of the five obligatory prayers of the day. It can be performed at any time between the breaking of the dawn till sunrise.
- Duhr/Midday prayer: Its time begins after the sun declines from its zenith until it is about midway from setting.
- Asr/Afternoon prayer: Its time begins soon after the time for Duhr prayer ends and extends to just before sunset
- Maghrib/Sunset prayer: Its time begins just after sunset and extends to a period of an hour and a half
- Isha/Night Prayer: Between sunset and midnight.

Muslim students need to fulfill their obligation by performing the above prayers at their fixed time. The lack of prayer facilities constitutes a gross violation of their individual freedoms and is effectively hindering the performance of their obligatory duty as Muslims.

Fulfilment of Muslim prayers necessitates that the place of worship be kept clean, prayers must be performed in a dedicated place, in addition to this it is necessary to have nearby washing facilities, and there must be provisions for the segregation of both sexes.

We stress that the performance of prayers is a fundamental tenet of the Muslim faith. For the majority of Muslims it is not something that can be separated from every day life; indeed it is part of every day life.

A significant number of Muslim students at Cardiff University are overseas students who generate an indispensable source of revenue; they need their cultural and religious needs to be met. To compete in a global educational market place, it is fundamental to the university that it should have such facilities and with a long history of established prayer facilities in many major UK universities, the reputation of Cardiff University as a centre of diversity and service is seriously compromised. In addition, with the establishment of the new 'Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK', the lack of adequate prayer facilities suggests that the University has used it to further the name of Cardiff University whilst omitting the pastoral and spiritual needs of not only Muslim students and staff, but other students and staff of other religious and faith groups.

Put simply, Muslim students should be able to practice their way of life at University.

### **The Current Situation**

Below are statements gathered from Muslim students where the need for adequate prayer facilities is most desperate:

### Trevithick Building

"There are many Muslim staff and postgraduates in the Engineering department and School of Computer Science. They have made a section of an office for postgraduates for performing their prayers. This is inconvenient and can be disruptive to the postgraduates who reside in the office. The room is accessible by key and so only the students with an office in the room can use it. This prevents other post grads and staff from using this "prayer room". "

"As for the undergraduates who by far exceed the number of postgraduates and staff, there is no prayer facility for them. Students are praying in halls and empty rooms. Basically, anywhere they can find. This is extremely inconvenient and quite humiliating. Students have also quite frequently been praying in the ground floor of a staircase, it is quite appalling conditions, since it is a very dusty place, and can also be a health and safety hazard."

### Law Building

"As there is no prayer room in the law building, it has meant that students have to travel back and forth to their houses on average twice a day to pray, sometimes even missing the prayer which has resulted in a disheartened attitude. At times if needs be, where ever there is a quite fire escape or corridor prayers are conducted there, which is not an ideal situation. However this shows how important the prayer is for the students."

### Redwood Building

"My lunch break doesn't happen to coincide with the prayer times and my nearest prayer room is not close enough to allow me to pray in the shorter breaks that I have, as I would be late for lectures every day. A prayer room in my building would allow me to pray on time and not have to do them when I get home. There is a significant number of Muslims in my building who would all benefit from a prayer room."

Currently there exist only two operational quiet rooms located in:

1. Bioscience building

The room is of modest size and hence lacks the space for adequate separation between sexes during times of prayer. In addition, it is poorly maintained despite our pleas to the department for it to be regularly cleaned.

2. Heath Hospital

The current amenities that are present at the hospital site are deemed by us adequate since a partition exists to separate the sexes and the area is cleaned on a regular basis. However, this service was inherited by the University after merging with the University of Wales College of Medicine (UWCM) and caters not only to students, but to NHS staff, patients and visitors.

At present, the rooms that exist are inadequately publicised by the University with no significant mention on the university's website or official publications.

### **Previous Campaigns and the University's Stance**

A report on the availability of quiet rooms was presented to 2 meetings along with a letter submitted by us (CUIS) and a brief on how other universities deal with this need. At the Equality & Diversity Committee it was minuted that action from this paper " was as follows:

- 6 that the University should actively progress this issue;**  
**7 that the Vice-Chancellor would progress this matter in conjunction with Heads of Schools, Pro-Vice Chancellors and Directors.**

## **Aims and Targets**

There exist two main issues in which we can derive our aims:

a). **The University's Secular Stance**

The University wishes to portray itself as a secular University. However this is not specified under the Royal Charter as amended on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005, nor is this statement present in the University Mission statement. However, we need to respect the diversity of the students that attend the university and allow it to maintain an impartial position. Hence the room should provide facilities (defined below) to allow prayers to be conducted but be open to people of all faiths and denominations for quiet contemplation and personal meditation. The room is intended primarily for prayer and hence the term 'prayer room' is appropriate as opposed the somewhat unambiguous phrase 'quiet room' of its primary roles and needs.

b). **Just one large prayer room or a number of smaller rooms**

An aim to establish a central mosque with the necessary facilities to hold, for example Friday prayers, daily Iftar during the holy month of Ramadan is not necessary since there exists two mosques in close proximity to the campus which cater for such needs. However, the establishment of a central room in the students union is necessary to establish the union as a multicultural hub for use for prayer, mediation and reflection.

As detailed above the need for prayer room exists most desperately in the locations furthest away from the existing quiet room and the nearby mosques, most notably the Trevithick, Law and Redwood buildings.

From the above discussion, the CUIS should actively pursue the following targets:

1. Establish prayer rooms in:
  - a. Trevithick building
  - b. Law building
  - c. Redwood building
  - d. Students Union
2. Specification
  - a. Size: a minimum of 5m x 5m with a movable partition (eg curtain) to maintain modesty and separation between males and females at times of prayer.
  - b. Washing facilities: for prayers to be preformed it is necessary for ablution to be made and hence the room must include such a facility ie washbasin in a manner that maintains the above partition between males and females.
  - c. The floor should be adequately carpeted
  - d. The room should be adequately cleaned and maintained by the University
3. Publicity of rooms: the university should advertise the location and intended use of such rooms for university students and staff.