HOW DO YOU SELL A UNIVERSITY WITH AN IMAGE PROBLEM?

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University is running a deficit of £350,000 (the most recently published figure for 1997/98). "A successful university needs to make sure it doesn't work with the assumption that it will just break even or slip into deficit," he says. "It needs to generate places to engage in interesting academic developments."

A group has been set up to look at savings and investing in different areas of the university to generate new income streams. Leicester is planning to create a virtual institute of lifelong learning to embrace the whole university. It will be overseen by a new director who will encourage departments to put on continuing professional development courses and distance learning for adults.

Last summer, the university had to enter the clearing system for 13 subjects because of a shortage of students. "It is not where I would want to be," says Professor Burgess. If he succeeds in turning the university's image, he will make it more attractive to students, parents, schools and employers. To help this along he is talking to admissions tutors and sees parents and students at open days.

The new vice-chancellor oversees nothing in his search for improvement. Before joining Leicester he noticed how confined and fussy the logo was in some places it was called Leicester University. In others, the University of Leicester. So he secured agreement for consistency. It is now the University of Leicester. And he worked with the new marketing director to change the logo. The old complicated logo sporting a griffin was streamlined to show simply a coat of arms.

Having cleaned up the logo, he is working hard on cleaning up the campus. On arrival at Leicester, Professor Burgess went on a tour of the campus with the estates officer, showing zero tolerance for empty sandwich packets under bushes. He also talked to the person responsible for parks and gardens about the landscaping. "Clearly, you can't make changes overnight but you can get people to think about it," he says. "You can get them to think about appearance. Presentation is important."

To the eye of a Londoner, accustomed to grime and litter, Leicester University looks in apple-pie order. The roses and shrubs were pruned and there was not an empty sandwich packet in sight. Professor Burgess's medicine is working. A former Warwick colleague says: "He came from a university which took pride in having really good grounds and gardens. Our line was that people are not going to give you any money if you look down at them." Prof. Burgess's last meeting of the day ends at around 6.30pm. It's a good thing, he has a reputation for being well organized. He needs to be. Running a university is about controlling masses of detail. And you have to get each detail right. Once that happens, a handout begins to roll and, before you know it, you are starting success in the face.
Comment

ALAN RYAN

"How will the new foundation degree end being regarded as rubbish?"

One is that UK universities aren't successful in the same world as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton because their endowments are too small. It's true that Harvard's $31 billion (stated) makes the £1.6 billion that Oxford colleges possess in total look meagre. But almost nowhere else has that sort of endowment; most American colleges and universities manage on smaller endowments, tuition fees, and, well, money. The generosity of American business foundations is much more important here.

A second misconception is that "free higher education" makes no sense. Bills must be paid. It has a relative which does make sense: "Bills at the point of use, paid for by the user and most efficient means." The Government lost the propaganda war by describing its new funding system as a system of loans. Nobody in their right mind lends money at a zero interest rate, for an indefinite period of time. To all intents and purposes that is a great new and a graduate tax. Talk of loans may frighten young people from families that don't habitually large sums, but the principle of funding, being what it is, has run out of time and collecting it later is not objectionable.

The alternative, from the fact that the electron has decisively voted against piling everything on income tax, as a society we are less like the United States. But, the fact is that we have gone down the tax road, and the only route around funding is from the US, Australia, and New Zealand. One virtue of the American system is that already so. In the UK, the government has no role in the education of the children. To be really hard-up families, the amount is nothing. For modestly well-off families, the answer is quite a bit, and for populous families the answer is a lot. In the UK, universities use government money to decide how much to lend students, and how much you need to give. An outright grant makes far more sense.

Family wealth is taken into account while a student plus point is that if you happen to be sending siblings to college at the same time, the same amount you owe remains the same. The difference is that generally, American loans really are loans, carrying interest charges that are not currently tailored to ability to repay. What's needed is some system that merges the virtues of our system and theirs. It's the details that will be decided and, until now, the Government has barely had to tackle them.

The writer is Warden of New College Oxford

Ham

TODAY WILL BE LOVELY, BUT TUESDAY? (WHEN ARE THEY LEAVING?)

RIGHT - THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY, SEE YOU IN THE MORNING

Studts Stories

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Fear not the professor has a cunning plan

There's a new man in charge at Leicester. He's dynamic, he's got a proven track record and he's determined to pull the place out by its bootstraps... they call him Bob. By Lucy Hodges

Bob Burgess arranges his first meetings for 8am, before classes have started. He clocks on at 7.30 because he always wants to be first. Burgess has this in common with the benefactors who founded the university, including the late Sir Frederick Gibbons, his first chancellor. Burgess is a man in a hurry, whirling through an agenda that already lists, barely breaking for lunch, always writing, constantly working to inject a new vibe into a place with an image problem.

The lone front runner, Burgess' answers several dozen questions, second in command, tells the full story.

A sociologist and teacher by training, the new Vice-chancellor is hoping to do in Leicester what Professor David Vande Linde did at Bath - catapult the university up the research league table, ensure it is not knocked out of competition through Clearing and put it into the black. The tactics are substantive, stance needs to burnish its image.

"I want to lift the profile of the university in research and teaching," he says. "I want to improve the quality of both." Leicester came 40th in the research league table in 1996. It's placed 21 in Times Higher Education

versity, subject to a highly crit-

ical report on quality, it is not in crisis. To boost teaching and research, he says, you need good communication between the centre and the academic departments. He is already getting departments to prepare for the next research assessment exercise in 2001.

He has set up a review body to examine the research of every department. "If I had been here earlier, it would have happened before now," he says. "I've been doing this review since December last year. As a senior management team we will have discussed the research base with every department in the university and at the end of February. For the past 12 years Leicester has been led by Sir Kenneth Edwards, a quiet, formal man who was addressed by his subordinates as Dr Edwards. Professor Burgess is a good deal more bouncy - and he calls "Bob" to everyone, has spent the whole of his academic life, until last year, at Warwick - the success story of the university world.

"What Bob is doing is using his Warwick background to revive Leicester," says a higher education observer. "It will mean working very hard. He is looking very closely at things such as promotion, the number and standard of postgraduates

He could provide a blueprint for other universities which have fallen on hard times

and of academic appointments. Professor Burgess has been persuading departments to go out head-hunting and to think about the kind of academics they want to attract. On teach-

ing, he has a neat opportunity. The current higher fee Staff Development package takes early retirement by getting staff to contribute money which is then matched.

So far, the academics are cheering him on, partly because he knows what is is doing but also because he is persuasive and charming without being insincere. Even academics can be charmed. Professor Burgess is one of a new breed of university bosses, refreshingly "unmummified" about the importance of being entrepreneurial. He is giving a lot of thought to practical matters such as Leicester's brand image and to "selling" its "university" in what has become a highly competitive market.

He is also endearingly honest about Leicester's shortcomings. "Leicester has not had a distinctive profile," he says. "If you said to a lot of people you knew about the things three universities of University of Leicester", I think, they wouldn't know what they were." One of his first tasks will be to decide what those three things should be. At the moment, he says, Leicester is not viewed for research in three areas. It's there where Sir Alec Jeffreys discovered DNA genetic fingerprinting: it has a reputation for space research, the only research that gets a lot of media coverage; it is one of the very few English local history. But Professor Burgess wants to put some students of distance learning and post-gradu-

ate education too.

Around 5,000 people are doing vocational post-graduate distance learning courses at Leicester. And it is the third largest provider of non-gradu-

ate courses in the United King-

dom. Not surprisingly, given that he set up the Warwick gradu-

ate school and the UK Coun-

cil for Graduate Education, Professor Burgess has decided to transpose some ideas. A graduate school is set to be launched at Leicester, giving postgradu-

ate facilities they need.

In addition, he is reviewing budgeting and the way re-

sources are allocated. The un-
There's a real buzz about it

When Bob Burgess took over Leicester University, it was in the doldrums. Now, its future is brighter. Lucy Hodges meets the man who must face mounting challenges in turning it around.

Two years ago, Leicester University was a jumble of civic university that performed all right but was not making waves. It came 40th in the research assessment exercise, was in the red and had to enter the clearing system in 10 subjects to recruit students. Its great claims to fame were that the post-Philip Larkin era worked in the university library and that Sir Alan Jeffreys discovered DNA fingerprinting there. It also had a fine reputation for space science and English local history, but was otherwise relatively unexciting. Bob Burgess, the new vice-chancellor, was determined to change that.

The signs are that he has made great strides since 1999. For a start, he has increased the university's income. There was still steady at £172m compared with £197m, but income generated from concerts, for example, has increased by 12 per cent. That has been done by encouraging people to think how they might provide new facilities. In conferences, says Burgess, "Good ideas don't just come from old guard people. Anyone can have a good idea and it's down to the institution to help them develop and champion it."

Leicester has introduced a central system for allocating resources. That reduces a system where departments received funding according to what they got in the past. Now, senior staff take collective decisions based on what is in the best interests of the institution. The university still goes into clearing - but for fewer subjects, Burgess says. A new unit of appointments has been made, including a professor of e-learning, who started this month. And the university has become more popular with students. The number of applications has increased, and the university, according to the second-largest increase across the Midlands, is up 11 per cent.

"There's a real buzz about the place," says Ann McManus, the university's chief executive. "It's taken a great deal of hard work. A supremely excellent man, Burgess worked long hours and made us buy more of a lot of people. He is good with people, and has the knack to meet the needs of the union, the Association of University Teachers, personally, rather than delegating jobs to others."

Leicester is more popular with students than it used to be.

Cecil Campbell, now at Nottingham, was a former vice-chancellor. He is passionate in argument and has a dedication to which he was attracted to Leicester to go. He states, for example, that the university is connected much more closely with the local community and he wants to ensure that it is pre-eminent in postgraduate education. Five years ago, Leicester was third in the UK for numbers of postgraduate students and had a strong graduate school. Today it is among the top 10 for taught and research postgraduate courses and has a graduate school. More graduates mean in terms of postgraduate degrees higher fees than undergraduate.

But the approach to graduate education also gets the university on the map. A huge office has been made to bring the university closer to the local people via a network of local community centres.

A network has been set up connecting Leicester and two higher education institutions with 18 further education and sixth-form colleges from Birmingham to Herefordshire. Here are the arts being taught, Burgess has more contact with teachers, and an annual exhibition now takes place in the university's botanical gardens. "It's a way to add another dimension, which brings languages of people and course and conference to the community and the community's needs that they are able to deliver a high-quality experience in terms of research and teaching programs on campus, but it also needs to be closer to the community in which it is located," says Burgess. A roll of innovation degrees in being called out, and links are being made with organizations in the region.

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