



Cherie Booth QC,
Chancellor of Liverpool
John Moores University
presenting student, Ian
Owen with the Brian Corfe
& Birchen House Group
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THE EFQM EUROPEAN EXCELLENCE MODEL AS A TOOL IN UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

Professor Michael Brown,
Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive,
Liverpool John Moores University

INTRODUCTION

The governance, leadership and management of a large modern university represent a range of complex and critical challenges. These challenges demand the use of the most appropriate current techniques to ensure maximum effectiveness. This paper describes the initial steps taken by Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) on its path to excellence in governance, leadership and management, and its use of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model® (reference 1), and other complementary management tools.

There are many ingredients required to create an organisation where effective leadership is distributed creatively in order to provide both drive and clear direction. The essential components are:

- a stable, simple and appropriate structure for the organisation.
- a sense of direction and behavioural values broadly agreed by all the main stakeholders.
- a senior group of individuals with a range of complementary skills and personal attributes who work as a team in a climate of cooperation and determination.
- a methodology and framework that facilitates 'joined-up thinking', continuous improvement and process management.

A fitting framework and method are opportunely found in the EFQM Excellence Model.

This well-proven model was adopted by LJMU to underpin its long-term Business Excellence Programme, designed to develop the overall management system that supports the delivery of the university's core business strands. The Excellence Model provides a fully comprehensive

structure for such a complex organisation, and also enables the linkage of all the essential requirements for business success within a climate of continuous improvement, without channelling decision-making along particular pathways.

Our aspiration is to develop the management system to a level of 'excellence' as defined by the 'fundamental concepts of excellence' that underpin the Model; this will be achieved by a programme of action based on our business needs, the progress of which is monitored by periodic self-assessment. In essence we aim to apply to ourselves the very same 'best practice' management approaches that we teach our students to apply in the commercial sector.

From my own earlier experience of utilising the Excellence Model, it was clear that there were a number of key preparatory changes required in the university as a precursor for its effective implementation. These changes were systematically implemented soon after I took up the post of vice-chancellor and chief executive in September 2000. The following short synopsis describes the changes; the rationale behind each element of change; and the progress of the excellence programme to date.

STEP 1 – ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

It was essential to ensure that the organisational structure was simplified, and that it was better designed to support a more devolved and locally-empowered management system. It was important, too, to get the right balance between the devolved management of academic delivery within a framework of consistent practice, and the need to encourage debate and broad consensus within a management system of essentially executive responsibility and accountability.

THE EFQM EUROPEAN EXCELLENCE MODEL AS A TOOL IN UNIVERS

To assist this process, the number of 'resource units' was reduced to a manageable number, and those units were re-grouped so they were more balanced in size. Consequently, the 13 or so 'academic schools' were broken up into smaller subject-related or research-based units, and then grouped within six faculties, each led by a dean. The academic resource units were therefore reduced from 13 to six, whilst the creation of a senior group of four pro-vice-chancellors, a finance director, and a marketing director with a strong strategic role reflected six further resource units covering the full range of support services. One of the pro-vice chancellors additionally carried the role of university secretary and clerk to the board.

These posts – pro-vice-chancellors, deans, finance and marketing directors together with the vice-chancellor - formed the basis of the Strategic Management Group (SMG), the main executive decision making body within the University.

STEP 2 – MISSION, PURPOSE & VALUES

In parallel with the structural changes, I embarked on a period of major face-to-face consultation with staff about the mission, purpose and behavioural values of the university. It was important that these were not perceived as being imposed but rather as having been developed by consensus to a level that ensured that all staff could 'sign up' to them.

This was an extended and comprehensive process involving all staff throughout the university, the outcomes of which were ultimately agreed by the board of governors, which had originally given its full consent and backing to the whole process of consultation. The resulting 'Mission' and 'Purpose' statements (see Appendix 1) were used as the bases for the later development of both the management system and the strategic plan; the agreed 'Values' set the cultural and behavioural tone of how things would be done.

During the consultation period, I had also been leading a HEFCE Good Management Practice project, in which the EFQM Excellence Model was applied to academic areas in four quite different institutions: the Faculty of Humanities at Bath Spa University College; the Faculty of Computing Sciences and Engineering at De Montfort University; the School of Engineering at LJMU; and the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College. This experience convinced me that the Excellence Model was the most appropriate systematic framework that could usefully be applied to a whole university, and that it fitted the circumstances of LJMU perfectly.

At this point it was decided to appoint a director of business excellence to work within the SMG to develop the key strategy of 'Excellence in Delivery'.

STEP 3 – LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The restructuring resulted in a number of personnel changes within the senior management of the university. The dean of faculty positions were filled by three internal and three external candidates,

whilst the PVC positions were filled by a combination of internal appointments and assimilation. The marketing director and finance director were both external appointments. In addition, at the level of the new schools, some former school directors opted to stand down in favour of research interests, and several new academic departments were created. Consequently a large number of the wider management group were new to senior positions.

The challenge was how to bring together newly-promoted and newly-appointed leaders with those leaders experienced in the older university methodologies, and to align this whole group behind the mission, purpose and values. An extensive leadership development programme was therefore undertaken, enlisting the support of a world-renowned consultancy firm. This move was critically important to the next stages of the development of the university, and was spectacularly successful.

STEP 4 – GAINING COMMITMENT

Following the appointment of the director of business excellence, an immediate programme of activity was required. Gaining the commitment of the full senior group was the first priority, as there was a need to undertake an institutional self-assessment and to use the Model both as a platform for developing the 2003-2008 Strategic Plan and as an indicator of key improvement actions for the management system.

A series of workshops addressed this commitment stage by introducing the Model and the fundamental concepts of excellence, and by demonstrating the absolute consistency of these with the recently agreed mission, purpose and values.

STEP 5 – CREATING THE CAPACITY

The next stage was to plan the process of self-assessment against the Model. A key requirement was to obtain demonstrable senior ownership of the whole procedure, so it was decided that the full SMG would be trained in the Model assessment technique. This self-assessment also required a considerable process of objective evidence collection. It was important for the self-assessment exercise to follow the concept of people involvement, and as such we asked for volunteers from across the university to form a team that would do this work. The term we used for this team was the 'Diagonal Slice', because it consisted of a cross-section of staff from senior to junior levels across all areas and disciplines. We had over 90 volunteers for a team that was to be 21-strong. This team, when established, was trained in the use of the Excellence Model.

STEP 6 – THE DIAGNOSTIC SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Diagonal Slice team then set about the task of collecting evidence of the university's position in terms of the nine dimensions and 32 sub-dimensions of the Excellence Model. They did so from the beginning of December 2002 to the end of January 2003. They were organised into pairs or threes, each responsible for one of the nine dimensions and its related sub-dimensions.

With the evidence collected, each pair/trio presented their findings to the full SMG over a two-day workshop.

STEP 7 – THE ACTION PLAN

The main output from the self-assessment exercise was a detailed action plan covering all the fundamental findings. Any organisation undertaking self-assessment for the first time will hit upon fundamental issues, and the key issues for JMU were:

- Strategy – issues of developing, communicating and executing strategy whilst maintaining strategic focus.
- Process – issues of clarity and consistency within management processes across the university.
- People – issues of performance management and appraisal, the involvement of staff, and inequity between staff groupings.
- Measurement – issues of measuring the right things, setting targets, and monitoring progress.

Many of the 'people' issues were already in the process of being addressed through various initiatives under the Rewarding and Developing Staff Strategy that had unlocked earmarked HEFCE funds. However, the findings did provide extra impetus, and additional priorities were built into these projects as a result.

Action was required, however, on the strategy, process and measurement elements unearthed by the self-assessment, and these were tackled as a matter of urgency.

The Strategic Plan 2003-2008 was developed in a form and style that reflected Excellence Model requirements. The document was created in a clear and easy-to-communicate style, with open linkages between the key issues, aims, 'hows' and measures of success. The plan also shows the top-level process map of the university; in effect, the way in which the core business strategies are delivered and supported. The plan was designed as a framework against which more detailed Faculty and Service plans were subsequently developed, in order to ensure that the overall plan is executed.

A major project to define and document all the university processes that are required to support the Strategic Plan is underway. These have been defined under the headings of the top-level process map that relates all processes back to the overall strategic direction of the university. This is a long-term undertaking, using the successful 'diagonal slice' team approach to gain rapid outcomes through concentrated activity, with a number of priority areas having been reviewed during 2003-04.

Another major project is the development of a measurement and monitoring tool that supports decision-making on an exception basis and in real time. It has the working title of an 'Executive Dashboard', but is essentially the university's Balanced Scorecard (ie the coordinated real-time management, monitoring and measurement of strategic aims, presented to leaders in a simple 'traffic light' format to

provide early warning of activities diverting from agreed targets). The computer software to enable this project was implemented in June 2004, and the base-level system has now gone live. This tool will be developed and refined over 2004-05 as part of the normal process of strategic review.

The projects described above are the direct responsibility of the director of business excellence. There will be a further self-assessment using the Excellence Model in 2005, and every 18-24 months thereafter, leading to a continuous cycle of development and improvement.

SUMMARY

The university's Excellence Model programme is not a stand-alone initiative, but a framework that facilitates fully integrated organisational development. The use of the Excellence Model is not something that needs wide publication, nor does it require all staff to be trained in its use; in fact, we hardly mention 'the Excellence Model' at all in day-to-day discussion. What we are trying to achieve over the next five years is a university that is strong in terms of the eight 'Fundamental Concepts of Excellence', ie:

Results Orientation: We will be increasingly focused on achieving the results required by the scope of our strategic intent, on setting challenging but realistic targets, and on achieving improvements linked to development initiatives.

Customer Focus: We will continue to put our students and other clients at the centre of our strategic aims, and to develop a culture of working with our customers to achieve mutual benefit.

Leadership and Constancy of Purpose: We will continue to develop effective leadership that gives clear strategic direction to the university, communicates that direction to its people and stakeholders, and remains focused on its achievements.

People Involvement and Development: We will increasingly involve our staff in improvement strategies, and develop them to deliver strategy and to break down barriers between academic and service delivery, fostering instead a teamwork approach to supporting and delivering core business.

Management by Process and Facts: We will continue to develop and improve the processes that we need to deliver and support our academic core business, and to remove any activity that is not adding value. We will use factual information in our decision-making in preference to anecdotal evidence or strongly held views.

Continuous Learning, Development and Improvement: We will continue to monitor, measure and assess our processes, systems, and organisational and working practices and improve these as necessary.

Corporate Social Responsibility: We will continue to recognise and discharge our responsibilities as a corporate body to the environment, to the economy, and to society at large as a good corporate neighbour.

Partnership Development: We will continue to recognise the need for strategic partnerships with other academic institutions and goods and services suppliers for the effective and economic achievement of strategy.

Put simply, we have taken the view that being an academic institution does not prevent us from aspiring to adopt best management and leadership practice; indeed, we owe it to our academic core business to provide the very highest quality of strategic direction and management support.

Already it is clear that one of the important 'side benefits' of this approach has been to make the academic community much more aware of the external environment, and to encourage them in

closer engagement with external partners to mutual benefit. It has inculcated teamworking across the university, and involved all staff in deciding how to improve our operations and where to make our investments. It has also produced a confidence in staff to be 'prepared to look into the mirror and be prepared not to like everything that one sees'; it has encouraged honesty, and the acceptance of continuous improvement. The use of the model has greatly assisted the cultural change that has been executed in parallel, and has allowed us to achieve some radical changes relatively painlessly – such as the abolition of ineffective committees that take decisions without taking appropriate responsibility for them – as noted favourably by the Lambert Report (December 2003).

The EFQM Excellence Model has proved to be a very appropriate and enabling framework for our work, but it is only part of the overall thrust of reform in which the university is engaged. However, for those looking for a flexible, 'non-dogmatic' framework to assist in culture change and team-building, I commend it to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the engagement of the many staff in LJMU who have been prepared to give the use of the Excellence model a fair trial, and to trust in the benefits that are now being delivered. I also thank my board of governors who have given strong support to the path which has been taken. Particular thanks are due to Paul Evans, my director of business excellence, whose enthusiasm and expertise in the application of the model has provided the professionalism and drive required to inspire confidence in others to use the Model with skill and success. I also note with some satisfaction that LJMU has recently been successfully assessed for the 'Committed to Excellence' marquee.

REFERENCE

1 EFQM Excellence Model. EFQM. 2003. ISBN 90-52-36-088

APPENDIX 1

The Mission of Liverpool John Moores University

"Our mission is to serve and enrich our students, clients and communities by providing opportunities for advancement through education, training, research and the transfer of knowledge"

The Purpose of Liverpool John Moores University

The purpose of Liverpool John Moores University as perceived by its members and stakeholders can be summarised as follows:

- 1 To create appropriate high quality opportunities that enable learning, advancement, development, and employment, and that are open to as many individuals and communities as is achievable and sustainable
- 2 To create and support opportunities for successful participation by under-represented groups, as well as for continuing personal, professional and skills development for all members of the university

- 3 To create an environment in which staff and students can engage in research that is innovative; that contributes to knowledge or to professional practice; that encourages personal and professional development; that enhances learning; or that is of social or economic importance to communities
- 4 To reinforce the entire range of activities with a culture of scholarship, and with a growing body of specific research that is consistently of national and international standing and benefit
- 5 To endeavour, through partnership and enterprise to impact upon economic development and regeneration, as well as social and cultural advancement, whether at local, national or international levels

The Core Values of Liverpool John Moores University

Full realisation of the Mission can only be achieved by a collaborative approach on the part of everyone in the organisation, so that individual attitudes and behaviour are key to success. The values and conduct to which staff aspire, and wish to foster and sustain, can be summarised as follows:

- To put the needs of our students and clients at the heart of our work
- To help all learners reach their full potential
- To aspire to excellence in all areas of activity
- To demonstrate fairness, equality of opportunity and respect to all
- To endeavour to maintain high ethical and professional standards
- To seek continuous review and improvement of performance
- To respond constructively to the responsibilities of empowerment
- To facilitate the empowerment of others and to encourage collaboration and teamwork
- To question accepted views and to defend independence of thought
- To celebrate and reward success

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