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Emergency Planning College and The University of Leeds

From Concept via Contract to Reality

“Not only will this benefit our members individually, but it will also help to reinforce the identity, image and quality of the emergency planning profession collectively”
(EPS statement on the announcement of the EPC University contract)

Over the past 2 years regular readers of Blueprint will have followed the evolution of the transformation of the Emergency Planning College (EPC). In Issue 39, the Winter 04-05 edition, we reported the launch of the competition to secure an academic support partner and laid out the logic for this bold initiative. Some 23 universities and organisations responded to the advertisement and attended the briefing at Easingwold in November 2004. Nine of them submitted full tenders by the February 2005 deadline. These 9 tenders passed through a structured assessment process designed by the experts in the contracts branch that initially separated the professional/technical and financial aspects, and then integrated them in a formal tender board. Our aim was to select the best bid that was affordable within our budget, not the cheapest compliant offer. Knowledge of emergency planning and civil protection was highly desirable but not an essential criterion, and therefore would only bear directly on the outcome if the ranking was close in other areas. In the event Leeds University Business School emerged as the clear winner, and in June we jointly signed and announced the contract.

Leeds University Business School (LUBS) may not be well known in the emergency planning community, although its parent institution is a member of the prestigious Russell Group of universities and enjoys a formidable national and international reputation for the quality of its teaching and research. The 2005 Financial Times survey rated LUBS 5th in the UK and 8th in Europe, and it is one of only 16 business schools in UK that are accredited under the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS). The school employs over 90 academic staff, and hosts over 2,000 students, some 500 of whom are postgraduates. One of its particular strengths directly relevant to the needs of EPS members is its innovation and outreach in work-based learning, catering for professionals in full-time employment through a wide variety of delivery means. In sum LUBS is a first class partner, with the capacity to attract and retain staff of the highest quality, a determined focus on quality within practical delivery, and the enterprise to maximise the benefits of our partnership. In measuring up to LUBS' standards EPC will lift its quality to a new plane. We are keenly aware of the challenges involved, and this article describes how we shall deal with them in the coming years.

We have now reached reality, underpinned with a contract and real money. In that spirit we had our first tasking meeting with LUBS to map out the immediate course accreditation actions before the bubbles had gone out of the press-day champagne. These began with the launch of a full diagnostic examination of all of EPC's courses, materials, teaching and support activities that will extend into the autumn. The output will define the baseline, determine the module credit values and identify the requirements for change and enhancement in all of those areas. From this we shall establish the vocational qualification level, and then move on from there to determine the scope and extent of the academic and professional supplements needed for the higher level courses and qualifications. The course design process then follows, and each product has to pass through the University of Leeds' quality assurance process in order to secure accreditation. This will take most of the next 9 months, but our earlier adoption of the 'Spine and Modules' architecture will simplify and accelerate the design and development functions, as well as widening the option choices available to delegates and students. We intend by September 2006 to offer vocational and diploma/certificate qualifications (and their associated transportable credits), and to be well on the way toward the design and development of an MBA in Emergency Management for delivery in both residential and extended executive modes. In the midst of the diagnostic exercise we were approached by an overseas customer to offer a proposal for a BA in Civil Protection. The rapid joint design exercise that we undertook with LUBS suggested strongly that this was a viable product that might appeal to new entrants to the emergency planning profession, and as a result we may offer this level rather sooner than we had originally planned. But in any event with LUBS we shall cover the full span from vocational to postgraduate by the start of academic year 2007, with all qualifications and degrees awarded by the University of Leeds.

In parallel LUBS are setting up and staffing an office at Easingwold to form a responsive link between us and to handle all delegate questions on course and qualification issues. The subsequent development of LUBS' subject area expertise and teaching in civil protection will march in step with demand for the courses offered and our investment in their capabilities. However, we have a clear vision of their growing presence in that domain, founded on budgetary provision in our longer-term plans. Meanwhile another benefit of the partnership is that EPC's course directors can exploit the opportunities offered by the University's Staff and Departmental Development Unit (SDDU), which include wider management training and teaching skills development. Beyond that there is an even wider range of benefits that we need to integrate, exploit and offer, with library access and distribution one of the highest priorities. Indeed, the more we learn, the more opportunities we discover that will benefit our delegates and especially emergency planning professionals.

Amidst all our excitement with our new partnership we have not lost sight of our mission and core tasks. We remain aware that a comparatively small proportion of our delegates may wish to seek formal recognition and qualifications, and so to meet the core demand we shall continue to provide training that is geared directly to their needs and to the requirements created by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The 'Spine and Modules' family will continue to expand and deepen, as you will have seen from our latest prospectus and the College website, which include the new 'Wave 2' progression courses in Risk, Business Continuity, Planning and Emergency Management as well as exciting developments in Communication, Care of People and Geographic Information Systems. 'Wave 3' is under development for roll-out next year, including Emergency Management Level 3 (EM3), which will be the basis

of a family of tailored senior courses. Beyond that we shall initiate the design of the 'Advanced Package', which is intended to meet the specific needs of experienced members of the emergency planning profession and to equip them for the most senior appointments in the field.

Nevertheless we remain convinced that we can square the circle between mainstream training and professional education. The combination of raising our game to meet the demands of higher level qualifications and LUBS' quality systems can only benefit UK resilience and everyone involved in its delivery. That's what EPC exists to deliver, and in partnership with LUBS we shall turn those aspirations into reality.

ENDS
