

# CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION

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## MASTER CASES

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### Leeds United: A New Era?

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Eights Edition  
Master Student Case Papers

# 2021

## **Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's Cases**

The "Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's cases" is a case series for applying the case method of teaching and learning in higher education. The cases are relevant to brand strategists in private and public sector organizations, as well as academics and students at universities, business schools, and executive education.

The cases are written by groups of master's students as a course project. The specially developed case format is defined as: *"A management decision case describes a real business situation leading up to a question(s) that requires assessment, analysis, and a decision reached by discussion in class. The alternative approaches and recommendations from the class discussion are followed by a description of the choices made by the case company. This description is then discussed by the class."*

The student groups select the topics of their case providing updated and relevant insights into the corporate brand management. The cases can be used as "written cases" (handed out and read in advance, later to be discussed in class) and/or as "live case" (presented by the teacher following a discussion in class). Each case includes teaching notes, visuals with speaker's notes, learning objectives, board plans, and references.

The mission of the series is *"to develop cases for discussion providing insights into the theory and practice of corporate brand management and reputation, with the intent of bridging the gap between academic teaching and managerial practice."*

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers at the elective course Corporate Brand Management (BUSN35 – five-credit course/eight-week half-time studies), part of the master's program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The cases represent the result of the intellectual work of students under the supervision of the head of course.

Although based on real events and despite references to actual companies, the cases are solely intended to be a basis for class discussion, not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. The cases are free to be used and are to be cited following international conventions.

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## **Leeds United: A New Era?**

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### **WRITTEN CASE**

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## Leeds United: A New Era?

The clock strikes 13:00 and the date is 25 January 2018. The board of directors of Leeds United Football Club has been called into a board meeting after receiving bad reactions regarding the new proposed crest that the club announced 24 hours ago. The room is filled with confusion when the board of directors, consisting of four people, are analysing all the reactions given by supporters and critics. Next year, the club celebrates its 100-year anniversary, and the new crest has been created as a way to symbolise a new era for the club. The board suspected that introducing a new crest that looks nothing like the old ones would create discussions. Nevertheless, after much research and consulting both experts and supporters, the choice was made by the board to announce the new crest on 24 January 2018, at 12:53.

### Background and History

Leeds United is a football club founded on 17 October 1919 after an auction at a hotel in Leeds. Previously, the club was called Leeds City but after the club had gotten into a bad financial position and received bad press coverage, it was decided to dissolve the club in the middle of the season due to allegations of illegal payments. At this time, the rich and football loving Crowther brothers heard about the football club's situation and decided to travel to Leeds to see if they could help out in some way. The two brothers, together with 1,000 Leeds City supporters, helped found the present Leeds United FC.

Elland Road has been the home arena since the birth of the football club in 1919. Throughout their history, Leeds United has had a few financial setbacks and was forced to sell the arena a few times in order to gain funds. The city council in Leeds has helped the club out by letting them rent the stadium until the financial situation stabilised and then allowed them to buy it back. This is just one of many examples that illustrates the strong support towards the club from both Leeds United supporters as well as the Leeds society.

Leeds United is one of the top 10 clubs in England when looking at the number of supporters the club has. The club's supporters are also known for being among the most devoted and loyal, not only in England but worldwide. Leeds United supporters often greet each other with a unique gesture commonly known as the "Leeds Salute". It consists of repeated beats with the upper part of the fist against the heart area. This has been going on since the middle of the 20th century.

To this date, the club has had eight different crests, see **exhibit 1**, with the first being created back in 1934. The current crest features a football and the white rose of York together with the letters LUFC that stand for: Leeds United Football Club, see **exhibit 2**. The crest has the symbolic colours of the club; blue, gold and white, and this is something that has always remained part of the crest, regardless of the changes that have been made to it over the years.

## The Incident

In 2017, the board of Leeds United decided to start the process of redesigning the club's crest in order to celebrate the club's 100-year anniversary. The management saw it as an opportunity to herald a new era for the club whilst staying true to their origins and everything the club stands for. More than 10,000 people connected to the club were consulted in the process of designing the new crest through digital surveys, meetings, one-on-one interviews and group interviews. The people that were consulted included supporters, experts, club legends, current players, club staff, the club owner, partners and representatives from both the Leeds and Yorkshire communities.

Flashforward to 24 January 2018, after six months of researching, analysing feedback and designing several crests, Leeds United finally unveiled the new crest to their supporters and the world, see **exhibit 3** and see **exhibit 4** to read the announcement by the club. The proposed new crest illustrates 'the Leeds Salute', which has been a typical pronouncement of passion and love for the club and is used by both people on and off the football pitch. It has connected people with an affection for Leeds United for several decades. 'The Leeds Salute' is commonly used on match days when fans sing the club's anthem 'Marching on Together' while putting their fist on their hearts.

Angus Kinnear, Leeds United managing director, introduced the crest as a signal for a new era in the club's proud history. As he revealed the new design, the managing director thanked the fan base for their support and love especially since the club was working hard to foster stronger engagement from the fans and the broader Leeds community.

Furthermore, Angus Kinnear stated:

*“Once we heard that there was a desire for change to help herald a new era for the club, it became of primary importance that the new crest clearly reflected who we are. Everybody knows how proud and passionate the Leeds United fans are, but since I arrived at the club, I have been in awe at the unique connection between the fans and the team.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“Updating the crest is not a decision we have taken lightly, but we are proud to have a new crest that is authentic to Leeds United and honours the quality and loyalty of our fans. It is a symbol of ‘strength in unity’ and a proud expression of the club’s identity and history.”<sup>2</sup>*

Despite the extensive six months of research about how the new crest should look like, in which more than 10,000 experts and supporters were consulted, opinions on the new centenary season crest were split once the design was revealed to the public. Even though some fans liked the new design, a large part of the fan base reacted negatively to the redesigned crest. Leeds United fans mocked the design as "awful", "shocking" and "horrendous" on social media and even former players and prominent football pundits did not hold back to share their opinions on the new crest, see **exhibit 5**.

At 13:03 on 24 January 2018, exactly 10 minutes after the official announcement by Leeds United, a fan-made petition was started by Steven Barrett directed towards Leeds United majority shareholder and chairman, Andrea Radrizzani, in an attempt to stop the club from changing the crest. The statement read:

*“On January 24th, 2018 Leeds United announced a new crest. The design is appalling. 10,000 people were consulted. This petition is to STOP the club from using the design. It makes a mockery of Leeds United and the club’s history. It is alienating the fans. It has to go.”<sup>3</sup>*

At 16.14 on 24 January 2018, three hours after the petition started, it already had more than 32,000 unique signatures. The number of signatures on the petition would continue to grow and by 13:00 on 25 January 2018, there were 70,000 signatures, see **exhibit 6** for the timeline.

As a member of Leeds United Football Club’s board of directors sitting in the boardroom analysing all the feedback given about the new proposed crest, *will you still vote to implement the new crest, or will you listen to the criticism and keep the old crest, and how would you explain your decision to the supporters?*

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<sup>1</sup> The Newsroom, 2018

<sup>2</sup> The Newsroom, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Change, 2018

## Exhibits

### Exhibit 1 The history of the crests

1934



1977



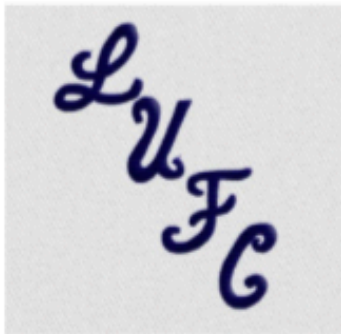
1964



1978



1971



1984



1973



1998



**Exhibit 2** 1998- current Leeds United crest






**Exhibit 3** The proposed crest






#### Exhibit 4 The announcement on Twitter

 **Leeds United**   
@LUFC 


 | Our new crest #MOT #LUFC

6 months of research  
10,000 people consulted  
Ready for the next 100 years

Watch video  [bit.ly/2BoRRfI](https://bit.ly/2BoRRfI)



1:02 PM · Jan 24, 2018 

 4.1K  11.3K  Copy link to Tweet

#### Exhibit 5 Reactions on social media about the new crest

 **Gary Lineker**   
@GaryLineker 

Gives me heartburn just looking at it.



3:19 PM · Jan 24, 2018 

 16.3K  3.2K  Copy link to Tweet



**Noel David Whelan**  
@NoelDavidWhelan



Carnage / car crash / garbage / shocker / monstrosity of a badge , I think u get my thoughts on that one

5:02 PM · Jan 24, 2018



1.7K 545 Copy link to Tweet



**NelMaNo**  
@NelMaNo



#LUFc decide to honour #MUFC legend #alexferguson with their new badge. #FergieTime



1:49 PM · Jan 24, 2018



7 3 Copy link to Tweet



**Mat Kendrick** ✓  
@MatKendrick



At last! An emblem encapsulating the way I and other dads my age drive with the window down during the summer months #lufc badge

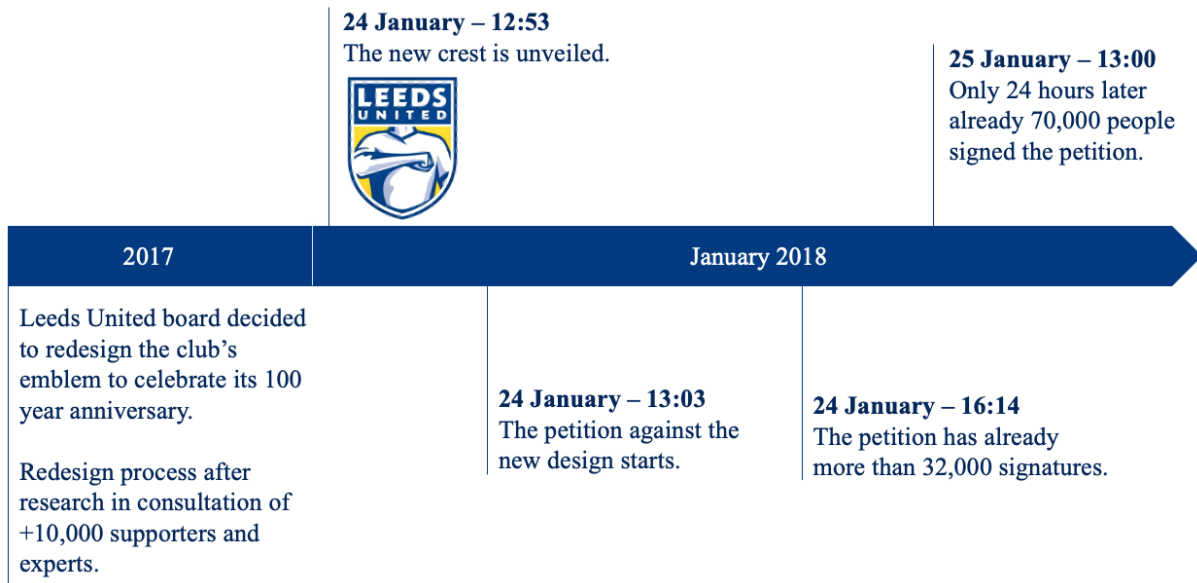


1:25 PM · Jan 24, 2018



58 17 Copy link to Tweet

**Exhibit 6** The timeline



**24 January – 12:53**  
The new crest is unveiled.



**25 January – 13:00**  
Only 24 hours later already 70,000 people signed the petition.

## References

Change. (2018). Stop LUFC from implementing the 'Leeds Salute' crest, Available online: <https://www.change.org/p/andrea-radrizzani-stop-lufc-from-implementing-the-leeds-salute-crest> [Accessed 10 February 2021]

The Newsroom. (2018). Exclusive: Leeds United unveil new club crest, Available online: <https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/exclusive-leeds-united-unveil-new-club-crest-590976> [Accessed 10 February 2021]