

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

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### **MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

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The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

## Leeds United: A New Era?

**24 January 2018**

10 minutes after Leeds United Football Club unveiled its new crest proposal, the supporters started a petition that urged the new crest not to be used. The immediate backlash made the board of Leeds United reconsider its proposed centenary crest design. This presented a serious concern for the board of directors as their intentions for the redesign had been sincere and Angus Kinnear, the Managing Director, had proudly introduced the new crest as a symbol of unity between the fans, the players and the club. Besides the negative reactions on social media, the fans also started to create their own crest designs and sent their design ideas for a new crest to the football club in protest to the announced crest (see **exhibit 1** for examples).

**25 January 2018**

As a first response to the reactions given by supporters and experts on social media, the football club released a statement on their website addressing the crest consultation. The statement read that the club was very overwhelmed by the amount of people involved with expressing their opinions and said that it is a sign of the passion for the club among supporters. The statement also made clear that the Leeds United board members are the custodians of the club but as fans and supporters are crucial to the club, the board will always listen to their opinions. Hence, the board stated that they are the ones that make all the decisions, but that they are open and willing to listen to the supporters' opinions regarding the crest as they are at the heart of the club's identity.

The statement continued by affirming that the board had seen a desire within the club to change the crest in order to be able to symbolise a new era for the club when it celebrates its 100-year anniversary. To turn this desire into reality, the club explained that they thoroughly researched the crest redesign process in order to celebrate the new era in an authentic way that represents the club's identity. The board also announced that they understood the desire for further consultation on the matter, to make sure that the new crest would represent an identity that both the board and the supporters would be proud of. The statement ended with the information that the board would hold off on the implementation of the proposed crest and that they would come back with more information a week later about how supporters could continue to contribute to the process of finding a new crest.

Furthermore, the Leeds United managing director Angus Kinnear admitted to the media that the consultation process had not been profound enough and that the proposed new crest did not properly represent Leeds United in his eyes. He stated that the crest should represent the club and that the board now had plans to go back

to other ideas that were created during the research period, and that those ideas should be worked on in order to find a crest that symbolises the club. He also emphasised the role of the supporters by saying that they are a very important part of the club. Furthermore, the board seeks transparency in everything they do and do not intend to hide from the supporters. He highlighted that it is important that the supporters trust the board members and their decision making.

In another statement Angus Kinnear noted that the board knew that the proposed crest was going to create discussions and that some supporters would be reluctant to change. This is due to the fact that the new crest design is a drastic change from the club's previous designs while also not resembling a traditional football club crest. The board had therefore relied a lot on the thorough market research that was done when announcing the proposed new crest.

## 29 January 2018

On 29 January 2018, the football club released an official statement on their website announcing that the consultation process over the new crest was reopened. The club spoke directly to the supporters and encouraged them to send in their design ideas for a new crest. The statement furthermore read that the club had seen a great number of good designs made by supporters and that the club would be open to involve the supporters in creating a crest that they would all be proud of. Therefore, they created an email address to which supporters could send their crest designs in order for every fan to express their ideas. The statement continued by explaining that season ticket holders and members would afterwards have a democratic vote on a few chosen fan-made designs and that the winner would be announced at the end of February that same year.

## 22 February 2018

The fans sent in so many design ideas that Leeds United Football Club decided to postpone the launch of the new crest. A statement was released by the club regarding the situation of the crest and what would happen to it once the centenary season was over:

*“Due to the volume of ideas and designs submitted by fans and their focus around celebrating our 100-year anniversary, we can confirm we will now be introducing a new club crest on the shirt for the 2019/2020 centenary season and beyond. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all fans for the inspiration they have provided which, following further consultation with supporters’ groups, will form the basis of a democratic vote later this year.” (ESPN, 2018)*

The decision was thus made to cancel the proposed design that was announced on 24 January 2018, and let the fans decide on a new one later on in 2018. However, the club decided to make small adaptations in the current crest that would be used for the 2019/2020 centenary season, see **exhibit 2**. This crest would be shown on special products made for the centenary season and on limited clothes, see **exhibit 3**.

## August 2020

After the centenary season was over, the club reverted to using the crest they had been using since 1998, see **exhibit 4**. Interestingly, the announcement made by the club when introducing the centenary crest wrote that the crest would be used for the centenary season and beyond. Supporters therefore thought that there would be no more changes referring to the word “beyond”. However, when the club changed back the crest to the one created in 1998 there was no communication of this decision to the supporters. There has also not been any communication made by the club about the progression of creating a new crest that was originally announced back in February 2018.

## Exhibits

### Exhibit 1 Crest ideas designed by fans

 **Jonny Harvell**  
@JonnyHarvell

Started this as a bit of fun, but now I really quite like the badge I've designed for #LUFC. What do you think @andrearadri? @LUFC #lufcbadge #lufccrest



11:49 PM · Jan 31, 2018

51 21 Copy link to Tweet

 **Ed Cowburn**  
@Cowburned

@lufc new kit launched. 8/10. Wonder what's happening with the badge? (Not mentioning transfer need) Never did post up the one I did... #LUFC



5:28 PM · Jul 24, 2018

5 3 Copy link to Tweet



**Kieran Robinson** @KieranJRobinson · Jan 24, 2018



Replying to @LUFC

Took them 6 months, this took me 6mins at Work and it's already improved #LUFC #MOT



**Yann Caubet**  
@YannCaubet

Ah yeah?



2:06 PM · Jan 24, 2018



681 74 Copy link to Tweet

**Exhibit 2** The centenary crest



**Exhibit 3** The centenary crest - limited edition centenary shirt



Exhibit 4 Crest from season 2020-21





## References

ESPN. (2018). Leeds to hold vote on centenary badge after backlash over design, Available online: <https://www.espn.com/soccer/leeds-united/story/3393271/leeds-to-hold-vote-on-centenary-badge-after-backlash-over-design> [Accessed 16 February 2021]