

Guest Editorial

Bill Rammell, Vice Chancellor & Chief Executive, University of Bedfordshire

'I have learned one great truth: The answer for all of our problems... comes down to one single word - education.'

Lyndon B Johnson, September 1964

Lyndon B Johnson delivered those words at Brown University's bicentennial in 1964. A private University, inspired by the ambitions of a Baptist pastor from Wales, and pre-dating the War of Independence; at first glance it may not seem that relevant to the University of Bedfordshire's modern mission.

Our aim, and my personal conviction, is to transform lives through access to an excellent educational experience. A diverse student (and academic and staff) population is integral to the Bedfordshire experience. It equips students and staff alike with the tools to be modern, educated and employable global citizens.

Back in colonial New England, Brown was the first American college to accept students from all religious affiliations. The University's current website proclaims this *'spirit of openness'*, set out in the original charter as *'(students) shall never be admitted any religious tests... forever enjoy full, free, absolute, and uninterrupted liberty of conscience.'*

We do more than adhere to a 'spirit' of openness and diversity here at Bedfordshire. A diverse and international student body is a good thing. But it must be harnessed so that it improves the academic experience, making it work for all students, the University and our local communities. We need to be at the forefront of creating a generation of graduates who are comfortable, competitive and curious about the globalised economy and environment.

As part of the same equation, I want to see more outward mobility for UK students. A period abroad, studying and working if possible, massively increases self-confidence, external awareness and development of skills relevant to the workplace. We at Bedfordshire are funding 150 places for students to attend a Summer School in China – we've had over 600 expressions of interest in a matter of weeks. We are determined to be a sector-leader in this kind of work and opportunities.

I believe in a University that is locally and regionally rooted, but that can and must play its part on the national and international stage. The *Journal of Pedagogic Development* is an excellent example, already gaining an impressive reputation for sharing and

exploring pedagogic practices. The Editor's (DM) passion for both this journal, and peer support in general, was evident when we met ahead of my writing the guest editorial.

My passion for the University of Bedfordshire comes from my belief in the place and purpose of higher education. I'm fortunate to have inherited, from my predecessor and good friend Les Ebdon, a University that is both financially stable and that has substantially grown in recent years. He led the University through certain periods of adversity and challenge, and now continues his commitment to higher education as a force for social justice in his new role as the Director of the Office for Fair Access.

But the University now faces different challenges. We have a competitive and marketised higher education environment in England. We also operate in an international context, one which has provided many opportunities for us, but one that requires constant review and relevance of our offer.

As the new Vice Chancellor, enhancing the student experience is my number one priority. Delivering the best possible University environment depends on an excellent academic experience alongside the social aspect, but also ensuring that we embed employability in our offer to students.

This is not a view of higher education limited to the economic. Student placements; a practice-based approach through our Business School; getting practitioners and experts into seminar rooms across faculties; and having students involved in the delivery of campus services all help nurture an appreciation and understanding of contemporary society. It enables students (and graduates) to shape the world around them.

Delivering that kind of student experience not only equips graduates with the range of skills and competencies that our economy needs, it gives them the drive to continue learning whilst they're earning. We foster a curiosity about the wider world. That is integral to our place and purpose in society.

As a 'widening access University' we mustn't be shy about celebrating and promoting this contribution. The communities we serve, locally and nationally, will seize opportunities if they are empowered to do so. Once

they get the chance, it will change their lives and their future contribution to community and country.

One of our local boroughs, Luton, is far from being the most economically prosperous in Britain. However, it is in the top five areas in England for young people who progress to higher education after completing A Levels or Equivalents. The University of Bedfordshire's significant contribution to that life-changing opportunity is something of which to be very proud.

The University's place in the public square of debate, discourse and discovery is important to me as a leader of a significant civic institution. At Bedfordshire we have the capacity to drive forward big ideas, following through our own efforts but also as a forum for others.

I've instigated a series of public policy lectures at the University, starting with the former UK Home and

Education Secretary of State, David Blunkett MP. It is vitally important that we combine the creativity nurtured on campus with challenge and perspective from outside. The next speaker will be John Bercow MP, Speaker of the House of Commons.

Starting with David, the series brings thought-leaders into conversation with the University in a public forum where we can advance real impact at a local and national level. I hope to see many of you at this and future events in the series.

There is a challenging future for higher education in the UK. We are not immune to those challenges at the University of Bedfordshire. But I am confident that our commitment to high-quality teaching and the best learning environment and experience possible, will ensure that we achieve further success for staff, students and our communities.

Cross-cultural collaboration with China

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Abstract

ASPIRE – Access, Scholarship, Partnership, Innovation, Respect and Employability – comprises a value system and a series of norms that underpin many aspects of cross-cultural teaching, learning and research. Cross-cultural sensitivity and exchange is at the core of a global system of higher education (HE), where we can understand, respect, and learn from the strengths of HE in each nation. Collaboration with leading institutions in China over a period of four years has necessitated respect of and sensitivity to cultural differences, innovation in ideas of communication, and growing partnership networks, of crucial importance in developing pedagogy and research, and all areas of learning, from the arts and the creative industries to science and technology. Exchange is of paramount importance, to enhance understanding and respect, and for us to become both culture- and task-oriented.

Keywords: pedagogy, research, culture, creativity, inspiration, critical thinking

Introduction

It is no coincidence that the University of Bedfordshire, with its strong and widening international partnerships, has **ASPIRE – Access, Scholarship, Partnership, Innovation, Respect and Employability** – at the core of its values. ASPIRE comprises a value system and a series of norms that underpin many aspects of cross-cultural

teaching, learning and research. Cross-cultural sensitivity and exchange is at the core of a global system of higher education (HE), where we can understand, respect, and learn from the strengths of HE in each nation.

My collaboration with leading institutions in China over a period of over four years has necessitated respect of and sensitivity to cultural differences, innovation in ideas of communication, and growing partnership networks, as well as in cutting edge research.

Creativity and critical thinking: Task-oriented or culture-oriented?

China is trying to develop its own pedagogy, free from Russian and Western models (Liu and Lin, 2008). In doing so, it needs to embrace new forms of creativity and critical thinking. In 2009, after I had given a lecture on creativity to staff and students at China University of Communications in Beijing, the Head of Department told me: 'We have a different definition of creativity; it is not the same as yours.'

This difference is underpinned by a major cultural distinction. We in the West tend to be task-oriented, and the Chinese tend to be culture-oriented. There have been many attempts by writers and researchers in the West to embrace China's culture. One example may illustrate some pitfalls. In 1820, Robert Morrison published 'A dictionary of the Chinese language'. In his