Clear and Unique Pathway.qxd 26/6/08 11:46 am Page 2

From an industrial training course to PhD research: a clear and unique pathway

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON AND LGR IN REUTLINGEN COMBINE FORCES

Mrs Anne Tate, Vice Chancellor of the University of Northampton, (third from left), with the board of LGR, with Dr Heinz-Peter Germann, LGR Director (right)

In an historic series of events held at the University of Northampton and at Leathersellers Hall in London, the Lederinstitut Gerberschule Reutlingen - the German Leather School - finalised a major agreement of cooperation with the UK university.

The most obvious outcome is that Lederinstitut Gerberschule Reutlingen (LGR) graduates will be able to transfer to the UK and join the final year at the University of Northampton to obtain the prestigious B.Sc. in Materials Technology (Leather). It is also hoped that there will be many positive outcomes in other directions of the relationship related to teaching and research.

Leather manufacture today is closely linked to the highest standards of ecology, product safety and hygiene. In addition consistency and durability is required in use as, for example, a high tech material in the automotive sector. For these reasons a comprehensive education of leather technologists is required.

There is an increasing globalisation in the area of leather manufacture, and the steadily growing demands on management staff in the industry. Accordingly, important international leather manufacturers and the global players in the chemical supply industry have focused strongly on the need for well- educated leather experts.

Based on close collaboration between LGR and British School of Leather Technology (BSLT), the faculty at the University, this further advance for successful graduates from the two-year state-certified leather technical engineer course at LGR is now possible. The curriculum of the LGR two-year course has been evaluated so that graduates can directly transfer and enter a final (3rd) year of study to become a Bachelor of Science - Materials Technology (Leather) at The University of Northampton. Post-graduates can then continue their leather education at Northampton to gain M.Sc. and Ph.D. qualifications. These education courses offer new opportunities in the international fields of leather manufacture, the chemical supply industry, furniture, shoe, clothing and automotive sectors.

Lederinstitut Gerberschule Reutlingen

Towards the end of the 19th Century, the chemical and technical bases for leather production had gained more and more importance in Germany, and as a result the Deutsche Gerberschule, the German tanners school, was established in Freiberg/Saxony in 1889.

As this teaching centre was no longer available post 1945, the German Leather Industry Association (Verband der Deutschen Lederindustrie) founded the Westdeutsche Gerberschule, the German leather college, in Regensburg in 1950. In 1954 this was moved into a newly built modern institute, co-sponsored by the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg and the town of Reutlingen, a traditional German centre of tanners. From the outset, the most important objectiveof the school has been the training of a new generation of qualified leather industry personnel. Today, the LGR is a recognised teaching institute offering a modern, solid training foundation for next-generation tanners from around the world.

The practical training offered by LGR in the tanning, dyeing and finishing of leather in the institute's own tannery is unique. This is because the focus is firmly on large-scale application-orientated aspects of leather manufacture, but all managed within a framework of course training. The school of leather engineering also enjoys knock-on benefits from the institute's activities in the area of research and development. These results are integrated into the tuition and practical training curriculum.

In 1999 a five-month "compact course" in leather technology commenced. This was given in the English language, and has proven to be highly successful. Based on this experience, LGR offers its internationally acclaimed two-year training course to become a State-certified Leather Technical Engineer (staatlich anerkannter Ledertechniker), also in English now, commencing

Clear and Unique Pathway.qxd 26/6/08 11:46 am Page 3

Whole hide fleshing at LGR

Samm/setting at BSLT (PHOTO: JAYNE WEST)

The finish spraying line at LGR

Practical training session at BSLT (PHOTO: JAYNE WEST)

September 2008. This is in response to the increasing globalisation of the leather business and enables more international candidates to study at Reutlingen.

LGR's new system of stepwise education in leather technology will be complemented by offering a qualification of "Process Manager Leather Manufacture". This is in cooperation with the Reutlingen Chamber of Commerce and Industry, within the framework of year one of the two-year course. In the course of this qualification an examination in accordance with the "Regulations on the Proficiency Requirements for Instructors in Commerce and Industry" will be taken.

British School of Leather Technology

Dr Mark Wilkinson, who leads the leather division at the University, greeted the party from Germany to the UK, said: "Working together in this way plays to the different strengths of the two institutions to offer the industry both choice and completeness in up to date leather education and research." He was "delighted to be finalising this arrangement just as Northampton was finalising arrangements for its centenary of leather in 2009". In both Germany and the UK, leather technology teaching began in the 19th Century.

The original founding of Leathersellers College by the Leathersellers Company (the historic Guild) was in September 1909 in Tower Bridge Road, London. The centenary will be celebrated in Hong Kong during the APLF exhibition next spring and with four days of celebration in Northampton and London in July. A series of smaller events will run throughout the year.

Over the years education in Northampton and London has been under the name of Leathersellers, Nene and the British School of Leather Technology (BSLT). Corium club members and alumni come from all these courses, plus a small number who studied at Leeds. For some years the BSLT has been part of the School of Applied Sciences within the University of Northampton which has allowed it to develop close working relations with fashion, design, environment, management, podiatry and conservation, all of which have a strong leather-related presence in the University. The one-year Leathersellers certificate and the three year B.Sc. are the most popular courses although specialist short courses for continuous professional development (CDP) are increasingly important.

At present, the BSLT is undergoing refurbishment of the tannery with a £400,000 grant from Leathersellers, matched with an equal amount by the University of Northampton. This should be completed in time for the centenary and will considerably enlarge the area of finishing, as well as updating the rest of the equipment. Also, in response to the recent Leather Forum in Paris, a new international pathway in "Leather and the environment", "Leather for fashion" and "Leather and business" is being developed.

The growth in leather-related research and development - particularly routed in the areas of collagen based bio-materials - is now developing in other areas. This includes qualitative and quantitative studies of the leather-users' experiences of leather, that is, people's response to leather.

Overall, research has become a major aspect of leather activity at Northampton University and, under the leadership of Leathersellers Professor Geoff Attenborough and Professor Tony Covington, one of the strongest research groups in the world has been built over the last decade. A Leather Futures Research Group has just been established to develop concepts and solutions for the leather and leather using industries. Part of its work will be to bring together the many areas of leather related expertise in the University of Northampton.