

Leader column

Building international relationships and looking to our future

My recent trip to China provided a lot to reflect on, not least the quite staggering scale and pace of change in the country.

The most astonishing thing was the amount of investment in academic facilities. My overwhelming sentiment was: 'I wish I had some British ministers with me!' If they were to see it, they'd understand how much other countries are doing and the level of competition that exists between international universities.

I was part of an 18-strong University delegation which included academics representing six faculties and colleagues from Research and Innovation Services and the International Office. The wide-ranging itinerary summed up perfectly the breadth of our existing involvement – scientific, cultural and commercial – with Chinese institutions, and our ambitions to strengthen and build new relationships with key partners. I had a very interesting conversation with the President Yu Lizhong of New York University-Shanghai, who felt that global universities should definitely establish an overseas teaching footprint in addition to research collaboration, if they are to become major global players. The key Chinese university partner of NYU-Shanghai, East China Normal University, has built a global park and is seeking partners to do exactly this. We'll be exploring in more detail if we could have a presence on this campus in future.

I also went to Xiamen University, a very prominent university in the Chinese top 20 and one of the most beautiful campuses that I have ever seen, located as it is between the coastal mountains and the beach.

Some of our alumni are academics there, which was incredibly useful. They spoke authoritatively about the University of Leeds, its stature and facilities, which helped to forge further links with their fellow academics. Professors Simon Biggs and Yulong Ding (Institute for Particle Science and Engineering) and I were visiting the new School of Energy Research. Like our own institution, they are involved in nuclear energy research and



energy storage, so we're trying to develop our already significant relationship with them.

The idea of joint degrees, '3+1' Masters degrees and split-site PhDs were all discussed.

It's important to stress that these relationships are mutually beneficial; since my return a couple of weeks ago, we've welcomed delegations from both Zhejiang and Xiamen Universities, as well as East China University of Politics and Law. I was also delighted to open the Leeds International Business Confucius Institute (LIBCI) which is based in the Centre for International Business. LIBCI is the culmination of years of work led by Professor Peter Buckley. It will boost trade by running training courses in Chinese language and culture for companies seeking to invest in China, and orientation courses for Chinese businesses hoping to invest in the UK. As part of the partnership with the University for International Business and Economics (UIBE), one of China's leading universities, staff and student exchanges will study in Leeds, and vice-versa.

Our submission for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is on track. We've just completed the annual School Academic Performance Reviews, followed by panel meetings to look at the draft submissions for each of the 33 Units of Assessment (UOA). As you'd imagine for an exercise on this scale, the results range from the 'absolutely brilliant' to the 'not quite good enough'. There were some really superb submissions, so we're using these as examples of best practice to show how it looks when it's done well. REF is definitely one of those situations where the more you put in, the more you get out. We're aiming high and so far, so good.

Plans for our stunning new Library are with the city planners and we hope to start building work early in the new year.

The building will occupy a very prominent site on Woodhouse Lane and it's going to be an iconic landmark. You can read more about the building and see artist's impressions on pages 12-13. We are hoping to follow up with a refurbishment of the Edward Boyle Library, which will become predominantly a postgraduate research library for the sciences. With the highly competitive market we're facing, having great facilities for students is critically important for our future success.

Our 2011/12 Annual Report and Accounts have now been published, and show that we have a surplus of around £67m. Some £30m of the surplus is due to a number of 'one off' events, but it still gives us a significant cushion, particularly as we face volatility and uncertainty of income in future years. You can read Finance Director Jane Madeley's more detailed analysis of the results on page 11.

This year has been a milestone in the history of higher education in the UK, and the changes have certainly created a lot of hard work for all our staff. I would like to thank colleagues for all their efforts and hard work. I hope the Christmas break will give you and your families a chance to relax and enjoy a happy and peaceful festive season.

Catch up with VC's Week on For Staff

Read the Vice-Chancellor's weekly column which is published every Monday on the For Staff webpages www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff