

## Leader column

# Some key questions for our future

**The Olympics and Paralympics were a great celebration and achievement for the country. The whole event was fantastic; the participation, the role of the volunteers and the fact that we won more medals than ever before.**

If ever there was a good example of how leadership and investment can make a difference and bring about a tremendous improvement in performance, that's absolutely what happened at London 2012.

I was lucky enough to get to four Olympic events: gymnastics; beach volleyball; the sailing at Weymouth and the triathlon in Hyde Park with the Brownlee brothers. That was definitely the pièce de résistance! There were more than 100 of us – staff, students and alumni – all in green and white T-shirts and all cheering on the Brownlees. It was absolutely amazing for our ex-students Alistair and Jonny to get Gold and Bronze, and the way they did it was spectacular, showing true Yorkshire spirit. They have been great ambassadors for their sport and, indirectly, for the University and we're very proud of them.

We can also take immense pride in the achievements of our other alumni medal winners: swimmer Claire Cashmore who won three medals, including Silvers in the SB8 100m Breaststroke and the 4x100m Medley Relay; cyclist Karen Darke who won Silver in the Individual Handcycling H1-2 Time Trial; and Ashleigh Ball who helped Team GB win Bronze in the Women's Hockey. There were many more outstanding achievements by our students, alumni and staff, which you can read about on the opposite page and on page 14.

There was further positive news over the summer, when Dr Neil Morris (Faculty of Biological Sciences) was awarded our sixteenth National Teaching Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy. We remain the university with the largest number of fellowships in the UK; confirmation that we're getting our learning and teaching right.

As the new term starts, we have the results of the National Student Survey to come on 27 September and I believe we're on target to improve across all six key areas. If I'm proved right, it will be the second year in a row that we've done that, which sends a loud signal that these improvements are real and sustained.

With the introduction of the new funding structure, this was a very different year for student recruitment and we are still analysing the final outcome for Leeds. During September, the senior team and I will be working on how to adjust our approach to recruitment to reflect the changing environment. We must acknowledge that all schools are now in 'recruitment' rather than 'selection' mode in terms of attracting the very best students and that competition is fierce. We'll be communicating more about this in the coming weeks, but I'm certain that we need a tight handle on every aspect of the admissions process to make sure the students we want know how keen we are for them to

come to Leeds. We're already doing so much to inspire our students and in this issue of the Reporter there is a particular focus on many of our current student-focused initiatives.

We're also dealing with increased competition, nationally and internationally, for research funding, for the best staff, for postgraduates and researchers. If competition is fierce at the moment, hold on to your hats because we're in the foothills of what competition really looks like! Other countries' universities are developing rapidly and many, especially those in Europe, are becoming more international, offering different opportunities and courses in English and ploughing in money. We have to prepare to compete, to take action and change things so we're ready for that different future. That's one reason why we're beginning a 10-month process to refresh our strategy. The last review was in 2009, and we have deliberately left this review until now because so much was going on last academic year. External pressures on the funding of higher education are changing and it's the right time to examine our strategy and to see if we are still on track.

We need to ask some key questions about the University's future, so I and members of the senior team will be asking people what they think at a series of open meetings, through team discussions and by inviting feedback either through the form inside this copy of the Reporter or via our website at [www.leeds.ac.uk/strategy](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/strategy)

We'll take the results of these consultations to the Senate, the Leadership Forum and the Council, to bring a refreshed strategy to conclusion by next summer.

I don't believe our overall vision has changed and the integration of our research, scholarship and education remains at the academic core of our strategy. With 2015 approaching however, it is the right time to reflect on how we most effectively deliver on securing a place amongst the top 50 universities in the world and how we adapt our strategy in response to new market challenges.

This academic year will be about delivering our plans, particularly around world-class research and education and not making any grand new initiatives. We have plenty going on in terms of innovation and change and preparing for the REF – our task is to make sure we deliver.

