

## Leader column

# Careful preparation ensures we are fit for a successful future

**Last minute preparations for the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics are in full swing. Athletes will be completing their final training activities, and all those in supporting roles will be getting ready to ensure the Games are an unforgettable experience.**

For all of us, the Olympics here in the UK will be a once in a lifetime event. As Kriss Akabusi says on our 'Celebrating the Games' video, "Don't let them pass you by".

We're hosting the Chinese and Canadian athletes on campus. Looking after elite athletes requires complicated planning but colleagues from across the University have been making sure that they will have everything they need. Others are also involved in supporting the Games with many of our students acting as Games Makers and looking after visitors to London. Thirteen of our current students or alumni are competing, so the very best of luck to these Olympians. We've already seen some of our staff and students carrying the Olympic torch, and wouldn't it be fantastic if we could see athletes from Leeds collecting a medal, too?

Another achievement of which I'm extremely proud is the University's garden which won a Gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show. Congratulations to Dr Rebecca Slack and the team from the Faculties of Earth and Environment and Biological Sciences that put it together. It was a great idea, so closely linked to our academic research. The University received fantastic coverage which not only gave gardeners good advice but, more importantly, really helped public understanding of science. The 'Pollinator' hat even went 'viral', which was highly entertaining.

We are aiming to reconstruct at least part of the Chelsea garden outside the Roger Stevens Building. A long-lasting legacy for everyone to enjoy would definitely be the best way to commemorate such a fantastic achievement.

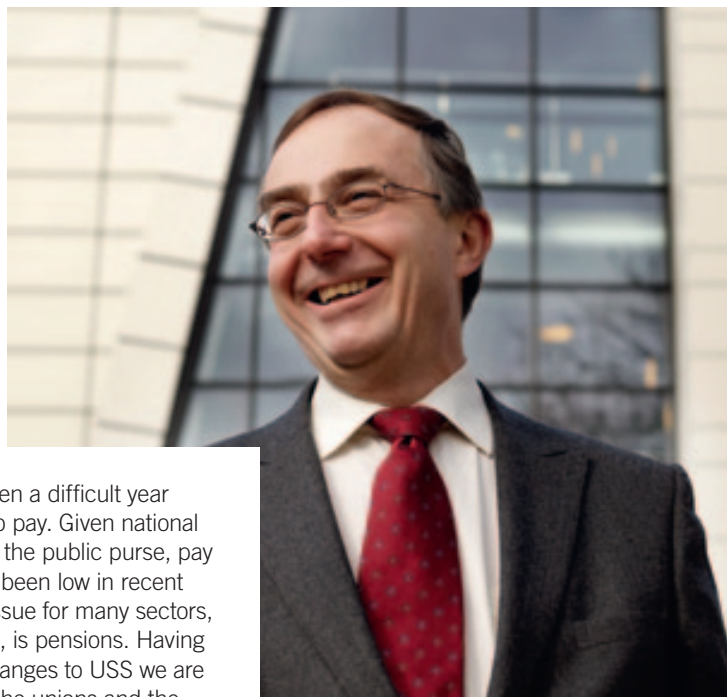
I recognise that it has been a difficult year for people with respect to pay. Given national austerity issues affecting the public purse, pay awards have necessarily been low in recent times. Another difficult issue for many sectors, not just higher education, is pensions. Having implemented national changes to USS we are now in discussions with the unions and the trustees about changes to our local scheme and a formal consultation with all members will start shortly.

The need for change to our local scheme is not prompted by the current financial position of either the University or the pension scheme, rather it's in response to the risk associated with the growth of future pension liabilities and their later affordability in future decades as people live and draw their pensions for much longer periods. Getting this right is incredibly important for our staff, for the future of the pension scheme, and for the long-term financial health of the University. It is a complex situation, but the senior team and Council are of the view that we must begin to address it now. The relevant information will be openly communicated to you, in full, during the consultation period.

At a time of incredible financial volatility, I make no apology for having a surplus in 2010/11 in excess of £35m, on an income of £543m. A strong balance sheet and healthy reserves are the best way to protect the future of the organisation, and the surplus we generate each year contributes to that position. This is an appropriate and important safeguard, which also gives us sufficient funds for reinvestment. If we don't reinvest, we're not only in danger of standing still, but of going backwards.

We have now recruited seven Leadership Chairs across the Faculties of Engineering, Arts, PVAC and Environment, with more to come.

We are attracting and appointing more brilliant people interested in the relationship between student education and research, and who fulfil the expectation of being excellent at both – a combination that is right at the heart of our strategy. Along with our existing staff, they will also contribute to our readiness for 2012-15 and to the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014).



We are certainly making good progress with our REF preparations. We now have a first draft of all the environment and impact statements and in September there will be a full mock REF submission. There's no room for complacency; it's important that we stay focused on ensuring that our submission in November 2013 is truly excellent. I'm grateful that people are working very hard to be included in the submission; there's still plenty of opportunity for research outputs to be completed and for contributions and refinements to impact case studies. I'm sure colleagues understand the importance of a good REF 2014 outcome, not only on research funding to the University, but also to enhancing our profile internationally, with future students and staff, with industry and with research councils and other funding agencies. Our performance in the REF will be a defining moment. If we get a top ten position in the UK, it will be an important signal about our longer-term, worldwide aspirations.

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone for their efforts over the year. We've been through a lot of change – not least preparing for the new funding regime – and it's been demanding, but there have been visible and fantastic examples of the effort that people are putting in. The Open Days last month – despite the weather – were a really good example of people going that extra mile to make sure that we're ready for the future. We now exist in a very different higher education funding system, but we are being successful at making it work for us and we can be confident that we will come out the far end of all this change as a world-class internationally competitive university.

Enjoy your summer.