

## Leader column

# Reflections on nine years at Leeds

Preparing for this, my last Leader column, and reflecting on the University's achievements during the past nine years, it quickly became obvious that it was going to be extraordinarily difficult to pick out highlights. But I'm going to try – with the caveat that I make absolutely no claim for comprehensiveness!

What springs to mind immediately is that the University now has a very clear vision and strategy – an understanding of our long-term mission that is embedded in our daily life. At my original interview I showed a slide that simply said 'T = R' – teaching equals research. It says it all, doesn't it? We've made teaching as important as research and have successfully integrated the two. I think that's a huge achievement. That's at the heart of our strategy, and I believe we're delivering on it and bringing our research alive for students.

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 was a good result for us, with a submission which significantly improved our rating for overall quality and saw us ranked 14th, up from 26th in RAE 2001. Now we're in the midst of the Research Excellence Framework, and around 1,100 colleagues will submit, all of whom, by our own assessments, are achieving a grade point average of at least 3.0.

We can be proud of our overall performance in research and innovation. We now have the eighth largest research income in the country, and have successfully diversified the sources of that income, particularly in Europe. We've also kept our investment programme going and I'm proud of the research investments and the impact they've had, particularly in terms of interdisciplinary research and education. We've recruited some brilliant people through, for example, the Leadership Chairs Initiative, and funded some excellent research projects, such as the transformation projects which seek

answers to the big, global research challenges. We've got better at fostering and benefiting from innovation, particularly since we put innovation closer to the academic community by launching the Research and Innovation Service and, more recently, the sector hubs.

We must, too, recognise our partnerships with world-class organisations such as Marks & Spencer, Opera North, ARUP, Yorkshire Water and Sinochem. We are also a key player in academic partnerships, including White Rose, N8 and, most importantly, the Russell Group, which I thoroughly enjoyed chairing for three 'interesting' years.

We have a fantastic relationship with our students; the Partnership work with Leeds University Union and the quality of our Students' Union is something that I'm going to miss enormously. A major achievement has been our improving scores in the National Student Survey, which show that we take our students, their education and experience incredibly seriously. Viv Jones and the Student Education team have done a spectacular job of developing the new model for the Student Education Service and the Curriculum Enhancement Project. I'm also very proud of Leeds for Life, our outstanding Quality Assurance Agency reports and the fact that we have more National Teaching Fellows than any other university in the country. We have a great track record of widening participation through the Access and Community Engagement team and schemes like Access to Leeds, and a Centre for Lifelong Learning that does an excellent job for mature and part-time learners.

We now have an internationalisation strategy underpinning recruitment activities and have seen a huge growth in international students, from just over 2,500 in 2004 to 5,000 today. Our global community is thriving. We've just come top of the Russell Group in



the International Student Barometer, a great indicator of how satisfied international students are with Leeds. Initiatives like Study Abroad, the Global Community and our Intercultural Ambassadors ensure that all our students can take part in international activities.

We're heavily involved in the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), with our academics providing leadership in and around the Global Challenges, which were introduced during my tenure as WUN Chair. The initial aim of the Challenges was to promote cross-institution collaboration, but they've taken on a much more significant life which has prompted increased interaction with national and international policymakers and organisations.

In nine years we have pulled together a world-class Alumni and Development team. We've just had our 10,000th donor and are in contact with over 200,000 alumni in 140 countries. That's a huge network of people who are our natural supporters. Their wide-ranging support – student placements, inspiring students, entrepreneurship and donations – is a building block that will stand us in good stead for decades to come. Success has been down to a team effort by the Alumni and Development team, the academic community, and alumni themselves. For myself, I've thoroughly enjoyed my contacts with our supporters – I have met some extraordinary people.

Working closely with the unions, and through a fantastic campaign and support from colleagues, the serious accident rate at the



- University's strategy launched
- Collaboration with Yorkshire Water
- New University visual identity unveiled
- The LOGIK Centre opens



- The Who return to campus for celebration of the Live at Leeds album
- Leeds for Life launched
- Portal/VLE introduced



- School of Performance and Cultural Industries moves to stage@leeds
- Cultural partnership with Opera North
- First Staff Festival held

- Leeds for Life goes online for staff
- Leeds Institute of Health Sciences launched
- University Strategy refresh
- Submission to Research Assessment Exercise 2008

- Ziff Building opened by Marjorie Ziff and Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks
- Alumni call centre opens
- Institute for Transport Studies wins Queen's Anniversary Prize

2004/05

2006

2007

2008

2009

## Leader column

University has fallen to just 2.5 per thousand. We have a culture that really values health and safety – the Vice-Chancellor's awards for health and safety are a visible sign of our commitment to that – and I trust that this will be a lasting achievement.

We also now have a culture that takes sustainability incredibly seriously. Our Sustainability team has input into activities across the University, from curriculum design to procurement of goods and services. Colleagues and students, too, are making their contributions through the Green Impact scheme and the behaviour changes prompted by the It All Adds Up campaign. We are now a 'zero waste to landfill' University – a fantastic achievement.

This University is healthy financially and that's been critically important. We have had to do some tough stuff, including the economies exercise. We knew that to leave the situation untouched ran the risk of putting us in dire financial straits. We realised, too, that our review processes weren't good enough and that we had to renegotiate the organisational change process. We came out with something that is fair, collegiate and involves colleagues in owning potential solutions. It has given us a vehicle to do some important work that has led to dramatic improvements in academic and financial performance.

More recently, the vagaries of student recruitment in the new marketplace dealt us a difficult year. Last year, in particular, student recruitment was the number one issue for us. We have all dealt with it incredibly professionally and are in good shape and alert to what we've



Receiving the Queen's Anniversary Prize with Professor Mark Wardman



got to do next. There has been a huge amount of work in schools and services to make sure that we're spending money wisely. The Integrated Planning Exercise has just finished and given us a much clearer understanding of what needs to be done to keep us academically and financially sustainable.

If I have a regret it's about the pace at which we've made changes. We're not fleet of foot yet – we need to respond to the market and move from idea to delivery faster. We're beginning to change but there is more work to do. We've woken up to the highly and progressively competitive nature of higher education. We accept that things are never going to go backwards in fact, they're going to get more challenging – but I think that understanding has helped to build our confidence.

Since announcing my departure, I've had many lovely emails, letters and comments from people on campus. The reception from students when I received the Riley's award for lifetime achievement almost had me in tears. The leaving present from the Deans also provoked some emotion – a single 'red brick' dressed with a plaque on which was inscribed "Leeds (is) for Life". You bet it is!

Most of all, I have to say a big thank you to my colleagues – the people I've worked with have been fantastic and I've been staggered at their dedication to this institution. I wish Sir Alan Langlands and everyone at Leeds all the best for a marvellous future.

### Michael

*PS – All staff and students are invited to the Refectory on Friday 19 July from 6pm to join me to celebrate everything we have achieved together during the past nine years.*

*It's a free event but please register for tickets at <http://goo.gl/t4QpT>*



- Lord Bragg gifts his literary archive to the University
- First Vice-Chancellor's awards for health and safety
- Deal signed with Sinochem to collaborate on research
- Launch of the Leeds International Summer School
- The Edge sports facility opens

- Partnership agreement becomes the Partnership
- £12m Liberty Building opens

- M&S Company Archive opens on campus
- Plans for new undergraduate library announced
- Students, alumni and staff take part in the London Olympics
- Institute of Medical and Biological Engineering receives Queen's Anniversary Prize

2010

2011

2012

2013

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## About the Reporter

The Reporter is the University of Leeds' staff magazine, produced eight times a year. More than 8,500 copies are distributed to our staff and stakeholders. The Reporter is produced by the Communications team.

If you have an idea for a story, want to write a letter, comment on this edition or would like to voice your opinion about University matters, please get in touch:

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The front cover shows Jonathan and Alistair Brownlee celebrating after receiving their honorary Doctorates of Laws from the University.