

Leader column

Building for the future

The University's strategic plan published in 2009 sets out a bold vision for the period to 2015 based on our distinctive ability to integrate world-class research, scholarship and education. Good progress has been made in implementing the plan, despite many changes in the external environment, but it is timely to 'refresh' our strategy to take account of changes in the higher education landscape.

The one-page representation of the plan as a strategy map has proved to be a powerful tool, providing a guiding framework for decision making across four key themes – improving the international standing of the University; achieving a world-leading research profile; inspiring students to develop to their full potential; and increasing our impact on a local to global scale. The plan also puts a premium on the principles of organisational and financial sustainability and makes a strong commitment to staff engagement and development.

I particularly like the explicit statement of values which underpins the plan. The values of community, integrity, inclusiveness and professionalism converge on the pursuit of academic excellence based on increasing knowledge, respecting academic freedom, encouraging critical independent minds, and promoting innovative approaches to education, research and knowledge exchange. This approach also recognises our responsibility to participate actively in the economic, social and cultural development of Leeds, the City Region and the country as a whole.

Change is endemic in higher education and, over the past few years, we have coped with far-reaching reforms to student funding, a more competitive environment in student recruitment and (paradoxically) a much stronger emphasis on research collaborations between universities,



driven by the research councils and other major funders. There has also been a much stronger emphasis on the importance of higher education as an engine for economic growth in the UK, whilst the growth in international mobility of staff and students has been driving new approaches to transnational education, technology enabled learning and international research partnerships.

There is still more to do in relation to the four key themes in the strategy map. To be a leading university in the Russell Group, we will continue to build on our inherent strengths: encouraging growth in the number of international students studying at Leeds and building new institutional partnerships for the future; achieving greater consistency in the quality of our research outputs, maximising the number of research active staff at 3 and 4* level, increasing research income and building on the success of doctoral training centres and the award of fellowships; maintaining our strong commitment to widening participation whilst maximising the recruitment of ABB+ students, continuously improving student

satisfaction and employability and building a vibrant postgraduate community; and growing our knowledge exchange activity and income by achieving greater collaboration with key industry partners.

This will be the stuff of the strategy refresh. We need to work across the whole University to understand the implications of the changes in our operating environment and we need to maintain a mindset of continuous improvement which achieves the best outcome for our students and realises our true research potential. I want this change to be driven through deep engagement between staff and students and by encouraging academic staff – working with the support of the wider University – to pursue their research ambitions.

As we draw breath following the introduction of the reforms in student funding and the submission of the REF, we have an opportunity to think in a coherent way about the future in three overlapping time horizons: 0–2 years where we will continue to work with the existing

News

University's campaign to Make a World of Difference

Supported by over 10,000 gifts to date, the University's £60m Making a World of Difference campaign is creating a range of opportunities for students and driving forward our research.

The Campaign is helping young people from less privileged backgrounds to aim for a place at university, supporting them during their time at Leeds and giving students opportunities to contribute to research, develop as elite athletes and put their best entrepreneurial ideas into practice.

The Campaign is also supporting research into key health challenges such as heart disease,

dementia and tissue repair; supporting work to cut the carbon footprint of our major cities and to ensure the security of vital resources such as food and water; providing key insights into world trade and the global political economy and enabling research that is unlocking some of the treasures of the University library's remarkable collections.

The University's biggest-ever donation, a £9m gift from Irvine Laidlaw – who studied economics at Leeds in the 1960s and already gives scholarships to students from less privileged backgrounds – is supporting our new library on Woodhouse Lane.

The Laidlaw Library will become a focus for undergraduate life on campus and provide a

strategy map to achieve academic performance to match the leading Russell Group universities; 0–5 years where we will invest in key areas of education, research and knowledge exchange in which Leeds has distinct strengths and genuine international excellence; and 0–10 years where the emphasis can be on potentially game-changing initiatives that will secure the long-term future of the University.

This process of change will also have implications for University services. The imperative here is that our approach is designed to engage staff and students in a collaborative conversation, ensuring that services are properly aligned and continue to be valued and delivered in a trusted and transparent environment, University-wide. Of course this approach needs to be supported by smart, reliable technology, clear standards of service, greater efficiency and streamlined workflow processes that leave scope for staff discretion; in other words a responsive, common sense approach which focuses, above all, on supporting excellence and innovation in student education, research and the University's wider mission.

The University's commitment to provide a sustainable environment with first-class facilities will also be key to our success and about £150m of capital improvements are now in train. In addition to major improvements already underway, notably the development of the new undergraduate library and the refurbished Sociology and Social Policy building, the Council has also given approval in principle to invest in the Business School, the Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Fine Art, and Computing and has also opened the way for improvements in Physics, Engineering and Transport Studies.

The launch of the University's Campaign has been catapulted forward by the single biggest gift ever made to the University of £9m by Irvine Laidlaw to support the development of the new undergraduate library and we applaud his commitment to the work of the University and his generosity. As soon as the new library is operational, work will commence on the complete refurbishment of the Edward Boyle Library. There will also be significant investment

new home for some of our outreach work with the local community. It is due to open in 2015.

Vice-Chancellor Sir Alan Langlands expressed the University's gratitude: "This is exciting news. Irvine Laidlaw is a committed supporter of the University and the library will become a permanent reminder of his generosity."

"I am proud to be leading the University at this important time as we see donations translating into genuine benefits for students, supporting excellence in research and promoting the part the University plays in the wider community."

Watch out for further news about the Campaign in future editions of the *Reporter* at www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff/

in the LUU building with planning already underway with the LUU Executive.

These are still early days for me although my visits to schools are proving very helpful in building my knowledge and understanding of the work of the University and learning about the aspirations and concerns of staff and students. My programme of visits and discussions will continue into 2014 and extend to the main University services.

Some of the ideas set out above have been framed in preliminary discussion with the University Council and the Deans, but I envisage deeper conversation and consultation with the wider University community during the remainder of this academic year. That said, I want to avoid an over-elaborate process that carries the risk of eclipsing the imperative of continuous improvement against key indicators of academic performance over the next two years. It is this improvement that will give us the legitimacy and the platform we need to move the University to a new level and to plan with confidence for the long term.

The University has strong values which will continue to inform the strategy refresh. For one hundred and nine years it has shown remarkable resilience and the ability to grow and adapt in response to changing circumstances. We have never ducked our commitment to integrate world-class research, scholarship and education, even when this has required difficult decisions to be made. These qualities will be put to the test again in the next decade and I look forward to working with the whole University community in building a strong and positive future.

Finally, I hope that everyone will have an opportunity to relax with friends and family over the holiday period and wish you good health and happiness in 2014.

R. Langlands

Alan Langlands



Lord Laidlaw (r) meeting our Chancellor Lord Bragg

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About the Reporter

The *Reporter* is the University of Leeds' staff magazine, produced eight times a year. More than 7,500 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 four of the University's current Laidlaw Scholars (l-r): Rosie Smith (2nd year, Product Design), Hannah Oldfield (2nd year, Theatre and Performance), Warren Wellington (2nd year, Law) and Shiba Azizi (2nd year, Law).