

Leader column

Increasing Knowledge and Opportunity

Consultation about the University's Strategic Plan 2014:2020 gets underway after the May Bank holiday. The creation, dissemination and application of knowledge will remain at the heart of all that we do and builds on the University's historic mission. In addition, we will aim to provide a wide range of opportunities for students and staff, ensuring excellence in every aspect of student education, research and innovation and promoting enterprise and creativity.

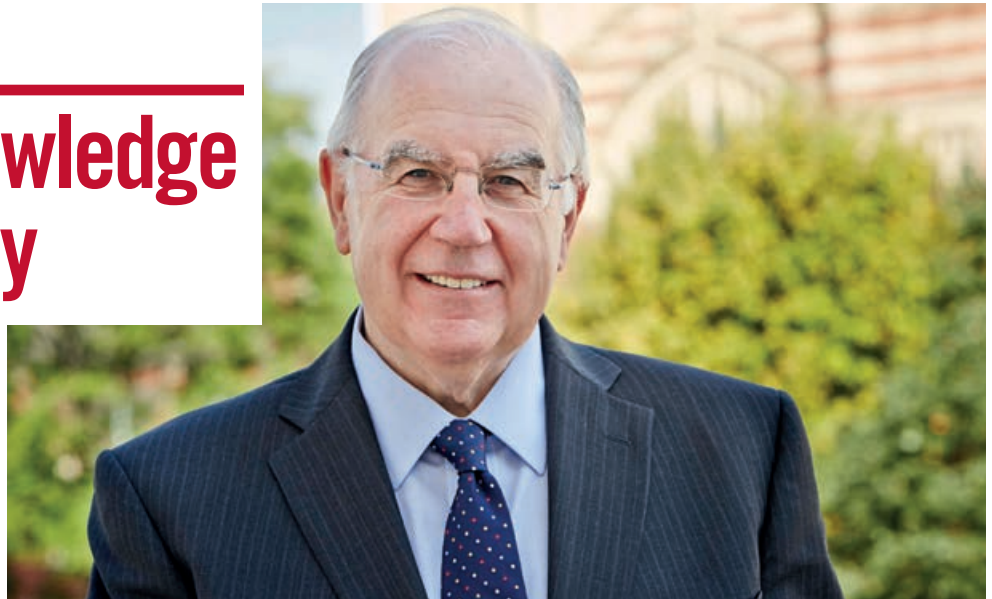
Increasing knowledge and opportunity in powerful combination is, and will continue to be, the defining feature of life at Leeds, distinguishing us from other universities and enabling us to address the challenges of education and research across a broad range of disciplines with energy and confidence.

This means that every member of staff at the University will continue to have an absolute focus on meeting the needs and aspirations of students, present and future, providing a forward-looking environment for education, training and personal development; putting a premium on high quality tuition, independent learning and critical thinking; and inspiring students to develop new knowledge and insights of their own.

It means making a step change in the range and volume of world leading research carried out at Leeds, operating successfully across the indivisible continuum from the arts, humanities and social sciences through to the biological, environmental, engineering and physical sciences; adding to the global stock of knowledge through curiosity-driven research; and moving discoveries and findings into practice through translational and applied research.

It also means effective partnership working – promoting creativity, innovation, enterprise and impact and working with other universities, industry and the public and third sectors to ensure the transfer of knowledge and higher level skills. And it means playing a full part in the development of the Leeds City region and the country as a whole; boosting our engagement with a world-class cultural community in the North of England, ensuring that the population benefits from our strategic health partnerships and increasing still further our £1 billion contribution to the regional economy.

Universities are complex institutions but this will not be a complex plan, nor a blueprint. The purpose of the plan is to set some specific



aims, to be clear about the results we are trying to achieve and to waymark the direction in which the University is heading. It focuses on what matters and will be implemented in an environment of high trust with streamlined monitoring and reporting systems.

It is a plan that will draw on the expertise and professionalism of staff and the energy, enthusiasm and talent of students, investing in people and ideas and ensuring that the campus is fit for the future and meets exacting standards of environmental sustainability.

The plan aims to provide students with outstanding education and all round personal growth, and commits to doing everything we can to provide affordable access to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for all who can benefit. It follows through on the root and branch transformation of student education that has been taking place in recent years and promises new programmes, a step change in internationalisation, the active involvement of students in programme design, developments in digital and e-learning and a new operating model to support careers development and employability. It also pledges to work with other universities, HEFCE and the government to drive progress in tackling the challenges of financial support which face postgraduate students.

In research, the irreversible trends towards larger, longer grants for high quality, interdisciplinary research poses new challenges and the possibility that government funding allocated through the UK research councils and HEFCE might be concentrated in fewer universities means that it is not good enough simply to maintain our current position. The proposed plan argues for greater consistency in the quality of research outputs, very substantial increases in grant income and a stronger focus on attracting and retaining high performing staff.

The University will therefore build on existing and emerging research strengths, invest in a new academic fellowship scheme and postgraduate research studentships,

and develop new platform technologies to enable research success, promote industry partnerships and support PhD students to develop advanced skills and expertise.

The plan positively supports the idea that the breadth of our knowledge base and our distinctive strengths can provide a springboard to address major global challenges including high impact work in health, water, food, energy, culture and cities. Work is in hand to develop a clearer understanding of the distinctive contributions that Leeds can bring to each of these themes and to determine the opportunities for growing our research capability and income in each of these areas.

Unashamedly, the proposed plan will focus attention and investment on the University's central mission of student education and research and innovation. However it also recognises the need for active partnerships, collaboration and enterprise locally, nationally and internationally; the crucial importance of providing staff with opportunities for personal and professional development and developing new ways of working; and a sustainable campus environment that we can be proud of, with £250m worth of capital projects either underway or being actively planned.

I hope that this plan will take a fresh approach to delivering change by investing in people and ideas and I look forward to discussing it with as many of you as possible over the summer period. Senate discussed the draft plan on 14 May and will have a further opportunity to comment at its meeting on 9 July. The plan will be submitted to Council for approval at its meeting of 24 July and in the meantime, I look forward to drawing on your experience and ideas about what matters and what works.

Alan Langlands