

Leader column

Celebration, recognition and a focus on the future

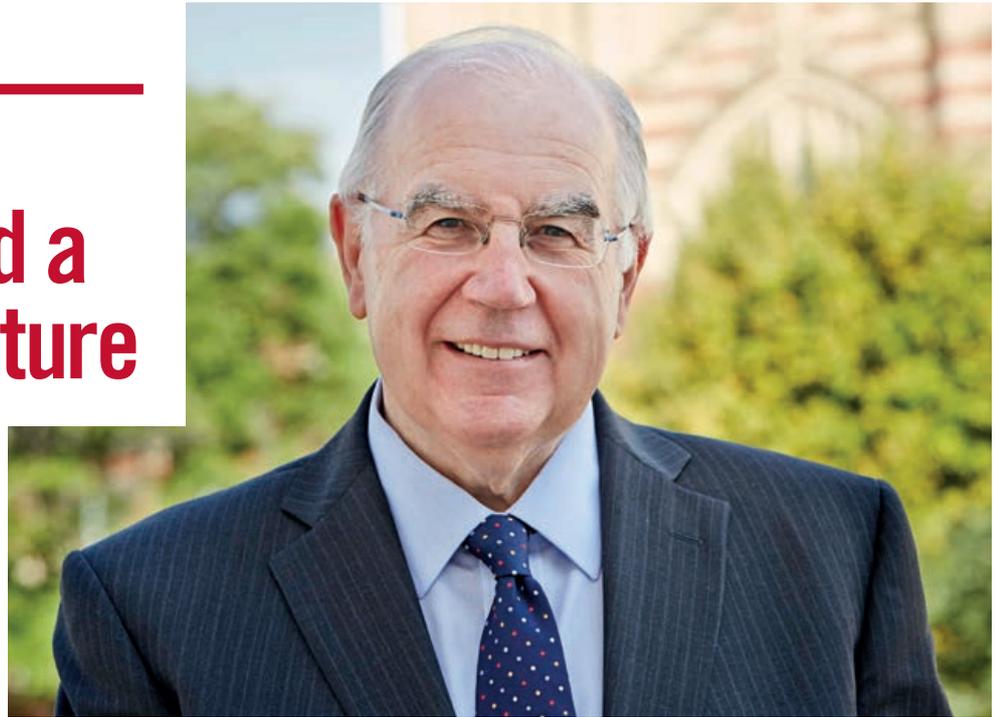
As memories of the Tour de France begin to fade and the academic year draws to a close, graduation moves into the spotlight and we look forward to two weeks of celebration.

The University will hold 38 graduation ceremonies this summer to mark the success of some 6,800 graduating students, each one eager to take their place in the world and ready to make a difference.

Working within the University's unique Partnership with students, Viv Jones and her team have developed three strong platforms – the Leeds Curriculum, LeedsforLife and the integrated Student Education Service. Although there is still work to do on all three, these initiatives are making a real difference, ensuring that students have an outstanding all-round education and opportunities for personal growth. As a result, they will graduate as global citizens who can go on to be successful in whatever career or field they choose.

At our graduation ceremonies, students more often than not shake hands with me and look over my shoulder to acknowledge a particular member of academic staff seated on the stage behind me. This simple kindness speaks volumes about the relationship between students and staff – a momentary glance that says, "I couldn't have done it without you."

So, this is also a very good time for me to say 'thank you' to all staff for your dedication, professionalism and hard work throughout the year. And perhaps the right moment to recognise outstanding achievement, including: Sheena Radford's election to the Royal Society for her "seminal contributions to understanding how proteins fold and function biologically"; the election of Julia Newton Bishop and Philip Quirke as Fellows of the Academy of Medical Sciences; Daryl O'Connor's election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts; the Royal Society's appointment of Andrew Shepherd as a Wolfson Research Merit Award Holder; and Giles Davies and Edmund Linfield who won the Faraday Medal for outstanding contributions to experimental physics for their work on terahertz science and technology. It is equally good to know that a number of early career staff have



won fellowships and awards from organisations such as the AXA Research Fund, Leverhulme Trust, the Natural Environment Research Council, and the Economic and Social Research Council.

Looking ahead to next year, the University's Strategic Plan envisages a forward-looking environment for the education and personal development of our students, and a step change in the range and volume of world-leading research carried out at Leeds.

We have heard through the consultation process with staff on the Strategic Plan that they feel that we need to make changes to the way we work, emphasising the need for greater clarity of purpose, less bureaucracy and more flexibility to move quickly and decisively at an operational level. They believe that the current systems of monitoring and reporting are too onerous and limit the time and attention given to delivering positive change in student education and research.

As a result the University will focus on five areas in 2014/15:

- **Leadership:** ensuring that all academic and service leaders have the capability to encourage staff to be the best that they can be, engaging in a two-way dialogue on the direction the University needs to take and its priorities for action. The intention is to free up time spent on administration and to inspire all staff to contribute to continuous improvements in student education, research and the provision of services.
- **Staff engagement:** ensuring that all staff are proud to be part of the University, understand where it is going and what their contribution can be; and that they are supported to be bold, creative and innovative in contributing

to our central aim of increasing knowledge and opportunity through our research, and through our students.

- **Talent:** stimulating higher levels of performance, by attracting and retaining the very best people to work at the University, achieving a healthy balance between internal promotion and external recruitment, and ensuring that all staff can have access to the development opportunities they need to contribute to positive change.
- **Alignment and simplification of systems and processes:** ensuring that systems and processes are simple, straightforward and easy to operate, and that they balance the move to a high-trust culture with the internal and external requirements for assurance.
- **Greater external engagement:** ensuring that the University raises its profile and awareness of its strengths in education, research and knowledge exchange with partners and funders. Two priorities going forward are to establish effective working relationships with research funders and to play a full part in the economic, social and cultural life of the City.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first academic year as Vice-Chancellor of this great University and I look forward to next year with a real sense of anticipation and excitement. I take this opportunity to thank the students and staff who have guided me through the year and I hope that everyone can find time for some rest and relaxation with friends and family over the summer period. Enjoy graduation...

Alan Langlands