

## Leader column

# Future ambitions and contemplation of our past

Following a summer of achievement – including strong student recruitment, campus improvements, key appointments, grant successes, the introduction of lecture capture, progress on developing the seven research themes, and a campaign to recruit 250 new academic fellows – we are now focusing on follow through and new challenges for the year ahead. As staff and students settle into the rhythm of the academic year, it's vital that we continue to move forward.

Although there is no room for complacency, our quest to provide all our students with an outstanding education and opportunities for personal growth continues to make great strides. The next phase of the Student Education Service project has been agreed, and will build on the foundation of the Leeds Curriculum, the Partnership and LeedsforLife. We will continue to ensure that our programmes respond to student demand and the needs of employers. Collaboration and enterprise is ready to make a step change, with the newly opened Leeds Institute for Data Analytics well-placed to identify and build important new partnerships. Plans for a cultural institute, 'academic health science partnership' and Innovation and Enterprise Centre will also enhance our capabilities. Ongoing work is underway to articulate 'International Leeds', tailoring our proposition to different audiences and countries, including creating a new pathway programme encompassing English language tuition and foundation years.

The demands of the research and innovation challenge facing the University are substantial. We aim to secure our place in the UK's top 10 research universities and to go further and faster where we have existing strengths. To increase research income by 50% is a hugely demanding target that will require a coordinated, focused approach. This means investing in people – including our programme of new PhD studentships and academic fellowships; infrastructure in the form of new technology platforms – where we already have great success in robotics and medical imaging; and partnerships – with other universities, industry and our major funders.

In the wider political arena, we await the Autumn Statement to see what impact it will have on higher education. My current sense is that this may be restricted to some additional capital funding. The general election will follow in May. Although the main political parties have said very little about their plans for higher education funding, or indeed HE policy in general, the comprehensive spending review that must surely



follow the election will certainly prompt change, and may have a bearing on our future plans.

This year, along with more than 60 other universities, we face the prospect of national reforms to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). The USS is no longer affordable in its current form and Trustees of the scheme are legally responsible for making sure that there is enough money in the fund to pay members' benefits, both past and future. Universities are committed to working with the UCU and USS Trustees Board to make appropriate changes, and discussions between employer representatives and UCU and the USS Joint Negotiating Committee are ongoing. The outcome of these discussions will be considered by the USS Trustee Board which then has a responsibility to trigger a formal consultation with all USS members and their representative bodies, probably in the early part of 2015. The current estimated date for implementing any changes to the USS is April 2016, subject to negotiations. Throughout the negotiations we will keep the University community fully apprised of progress through clear, impartial communications.

Moving from future ambitions to contemplation of the University's past, I was honoured to attend the rededication of the University's Brotherton War Memorial – one of the most poignant and moving events of the extraordinary Legacies of War (LoW) centenary project which continues to capture the imagination of so many people, local, national and international. The ceremony celebrated the men – staff and students - with connections to the University, who served during the First World War. Of the 328 names on the memorial, 25 were added in August this year after their stories were uncovered by community researcher David Stowe, who is working alongside our academic staff on the LoW project.

An accompanying exhibition – University of Leeds: Legacies of the First World War – is now open in the Parkinson Building. It tells the stories of some of the people commemorated by

the Brotherton Memorial, as well as setting out different aspects of life at the University during the conflict, and I would urge you to visit it.

The rededication service was followed by Anthem for Doomed Youth, a concert that saw former Poet Laureate Sir Andrew Motion and pianist Ian Buckle present poems and music carefully chosen to commemorate and reflect the experiences of people caught up in the tragedies of war, in particular the First World War.

This concert was held in the Clothworkers Hall and formed part of the International Concert Series. Jillian Johnson and her team do a superb job planning the series, and the breadth of this year's programme and the calibre of performers is really something to celebrate. I recently also attended and enjoyed an evening featuring the Hallé Soloists and pianist Andrew Tyson – one of the successes of the 2012 Leeds International Piano Competition (LIPC) – and there is much to look forward to as the year progresses. The current exhibition in the foyer of the Clothworkers Hall of work by our alumna Hannah Ostapjuk – including a portrait of former Vice-Chancellor Professor Michael Arthur – served to remind me of the University's unflinching commitment to supporting the arts and culture.

The work of the Friends of University Art and Music (FUAM) also enriches the cultural life of the institution through its support for the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery and the International Concert Series. Its enthusiastic promotion of young artists and performers is especially important. With the University's Public Art Strategy now in place, the LIPC returning to Leeds next summer, and our diverse programme of arts events and activities, I am confident that the University's contribution to the cultural life of the city and region will flourish and grow.

Alan Langlands