

Leader column

Days decrease, and autumn grows, autumn in everything.

Robert Browning's view of the world is certainly true in universities. This is our busiest time of year – a time to harvest recent successes and to prepare the ground for the year ahead. It is also a time to think about winter's chill or – as it is known in Whitehall – the comprehensive spending review!

I was pleased to lead a University delegation to China at the end of October to celebrate the formation of the University's first overseas joint school, in partnership with Southwest Jiaotong University (SWJTU). The Leeds-SWJTU Joint School is an important milestone in our drive to increase the University's international reach. It will be based in Chengdu – one of China's largest cities - and taught in English using the Leeds curriculum with important additions to meet the needs of Chinese students. The Joint School – which received the endorsement of the Prime Minister David Cameron – has strong support from the Chinese Ministry of Education to recruit up to 1,200 of the brightest high school students in China over four years, beginning with an initial



University Academic Fellows at the welcome event in the Great Hall

cohort of 200 undergraduates in September 2016. A significant number of these students are likely to spend time in Leeds.

The opening of the Joint School is the culmination of many months of careful planning, and I would like to thank colleagues both here and in SWJTU for their determination and hard work, particularly our Dean of Engineering Professor Peter Jimack who has led this initiative with distinction.

The University of Leeds has major strengths in education and research across engineering and transport having twice won the Queen's Anniversary Prize for its work in these areas. SWJTU has particular strengths in transport-related engineering and is a key centre in China for high speed rail innovation with 'National Key Research Laboratories' in track transportation and traction power. The new School will address future skills requirements in these and many other areas and both universities are committed to extending the collaboration to include postgraduate programmes and research links.

Many of the students we welcome from SWJTU will build a lifelong attachment to the University and the city of Leeds. The strength and enduring nature of the relationship our former students have with the University was brought home to me during this year's Big Get Together. Initiated by our Alumni and Development team and held over nine days in September, alumni in 32 countries organised 54 events including picnics, barbecues and a cycle ride around Kuala Lumpur! I cannot over-state how much we value the support of our alumni, whether they are giving careers advice, funding scholarships, arranging internships, establishing networks or even – as will be the case during a forthcoming visit by the Reverend Richard Coles to deliver our annual alumni lecture – providing wry observation and entertainment. Recent get togethers with alumni in New York, Boston and Toronto simply reinforce this message.

Later this month we will be hosting 'One Day in Leeds' for some of our most senior alumni. They will hear directly from some of the undergraduate and postgraduate students that



Sir Alan Langlands and Xu Fei, President of SWJTU, try out a high speed train simulator at SWJTU

they are supporting, as well as academics who will showcase the great strides that alumni and other donors are enabling them to make in fields such as robotics, cancer treatment, advanced materials, arts and culture. Those attending will also get some very exciting news about our 'Making a World of Difference' campaign which I will touch on in the next edition of the *Reporter*.

Helping talented academics to develop their careers and boosting our research strength is a cornerstone of our Strategic Plan. The first cohort of 75 University Academics Fellows have now arrived in Leeds. I was delighted to attend a welcome event for many of them and inspired by their enthusiasm and ambition, and their level of engagement with representatives from the University's strategic research themes and interdisciplinary research platforms. This introductory session was the first part of a brand new programme designed to support career progression during their fellowship. I believe that our fellowship scheme is unique in its scope and scale and we will do everything we can to give the UAFs the knowledge and opportunities they need to build strong, independent research portfolios and, in time, to deliver innovative research-led teaching.

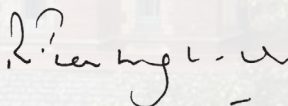
Recruitment of the second cohort is already well underway; we received some 2,700 applications for the 90 fellowships – an extremely heartening result and an increase of 20% compared to the first year of the scheme. These high-quality candidates represent 110 different nationalities and Schools are now busily long-listing and organising preliminary interviews. Later stages will see candidates visiting the University, presenting seminars and being interviewed. Our aim is to complete recruitment by the end of the year wherever possible.

The arrival of our UAFs will enhance and strengthen important areas of our research. This investment comes alongside significant external funding for initiatives such as the Leeds Institute

for Data Analytics, the Astbury Centre for Structural and Molecular Biology, the National Facility for Innovative Robotic Systems; and of course our own plans for enterprise and innovation; the integration of engineering and physical sciences; and cultural collaboration. There is some important ground work in place and I believe that we are entering a new, more outward-looking phase that will bring many of our research capabilities and achievements the external recognition and support they deserve.

We are broadening our external focus, too, by bringing the Leeds story to wider local, regional and national audiences. The forthcoming impact event – Investing in Knowledge, Creating Opportunity – will be the first time we have presented the breadth of our activities, and their economic, social and cultural impact, to the city region and beyond. We have invited people from industry, local government, business, health and education to come and find out about the significance of the University and the contribution we make in five key areas – economic impact, research, student education, community, and international reach and influence. The event will encompass a panel discussion, expert speakers and an exhibition in Parkinson Court that showcases examples of how our researchers are meeting global challenges. I hope that it will fix firmly in people's minds the valuable contributions we already make to the wide range of communities in which we operate, and raise awareness of the huge potential that exists for further growth, collaboration and partnership working.

And autumn grows...



Vice-Chancellor Sir Alan Langlands

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About the *Reporter*

The *Reporter* is the University of Leeds' staff magazine, produced eight times a year. More than 7,600 copies are distributed to our staff and stakeholders. The *Reporter* is produced by the Communications team.

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The front cover shows Vice-Chancellor Sir Alan Langlands with President Xu Fei of from SWJTU.



Alumni at the Big Get Together in Hong Kong
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