

Leader column

‘International Leeds’

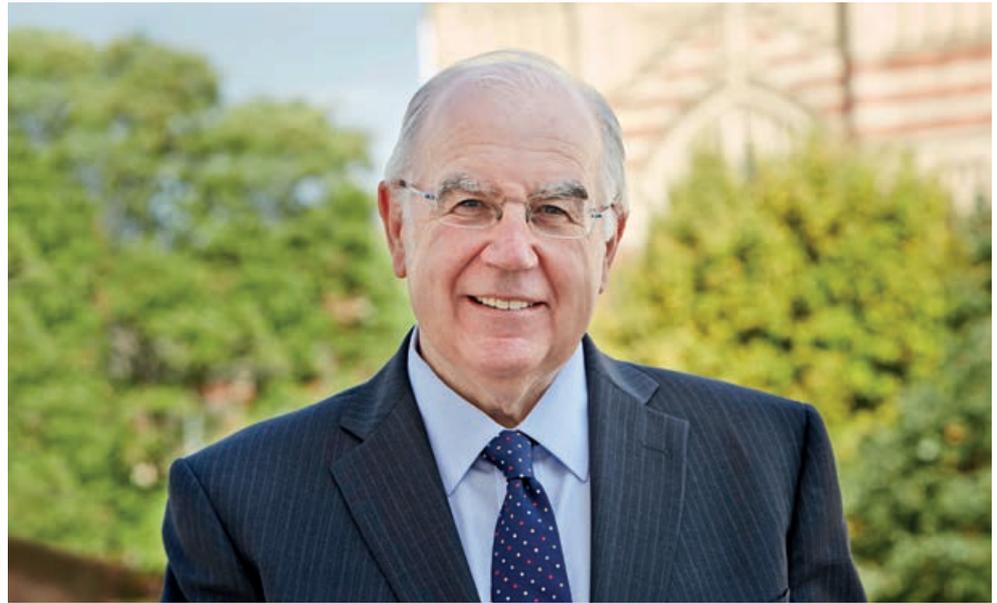
Innovations in transport and communication mean that the world is now equivalent in size to a single European country a century ago. But that does not mean that challenges we face are shrinking or becoming easier to meet – far from it.

The major global issues of providing the world’s growing population with energy, food, water, health care and security in the face of rapid environmental and social change are growing and becoming more complex. As a research-intensive university it is a key part of our task to work with governments, higher education institutions, businesses and non-governmental organisations to tackle these challenges.

Our strategic plan to take ‘International Leeds’ to a new level is already bearing fruit and helping to position us firmly on the global stage. Events such as the recent Astbury Conversation – cited by Nobel prize winner Professor Michael Levitt as “one of the best-run academic symposia” he has ever attended – are attracting international audiences. This inaugural event was a superb example of how we can showcase our research at Leeds to both public and academic audiences, and foster collaboration with other institutions.

I hope that future events of a similar calibre will be hosted by our new Cultural Institute and the Priestley Centre for Climate, to name just two. Strategic groupings of this type are – and will be – essential to help us establish more and stronger international relationships. They will enable us to forge links such as those already existing between Priestley climate researchers at Leeds with Norway’s foremost institute for climate research, CICERO*. Together, they are developing joint leadership of an international world climate research project and taking first steps towards a joint doctoral training programme.

It is also vital that we continue to establish and build enduring partnerships in student education. For example, in September the first cohort of students will arrive in Leeds on a programme established by the Faculty of Arts jointly with Sarah Lawrence College, a prestigious liberal arts college in New York State. And student recruitment is now



well underway for the four undergraduate engineering programmes offered by the Southwest Jiaotong University-Leeds Joint School.

As well as attracting international academics, students and organisations to our vibrant campus, we must continue to look outwards and take the Leeds message to a wider global audience. I have recently returned from a trip to China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore designed to do just that. I was privileged to visit Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in China to take part in celebrations marking the 10th cohort of students graduating – and the achievements of 250 alumni – from a joint Leeds-Guangwai MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Our partnership with Guangwai has provided an excellent research base for our School of Education staff involved in the programme, and we are now discussing ways to build on this success by broadening our partnership to encompass new academic activities.

This trip also enabled Professor Rob Richardson (Mechanical Engineering) to explore opportunities for collaboration in the field of innovative robotics with visits to the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Professor Andy Gouldson and I spent time in Malaysia and Singapore, where we visited the British High Commission and the University Teknologi Malaysia UMT, and met representatives of the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education.

Throughout the Asian trip we had warm support from our alumni at events in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. I experienced again what great help our former students can be in opening up educational and professional networks in their home countries. Professors Richardson and Gouldson gave outstanding public lectures during the trip, bringing the educational

and research opportunities at Leeds to new audiences.

It is clear that having an international focus and collaborative approach to research will be even more important to our success in securing research funding in future. The government’s new Global Challenges Research Fund of £1.5bn over five years is expected to account for 10% of Research Council UK funding by the end of the decade, and there are already signs that its main requirement – for research to address the problems of developing countries – is influencing funding priorities. Similarly, the Newton Fund for research which promotes the economic development and social welfare of developing countries was increased last year from £75m to £150m a year until 2021. To meet the criteria for this Fund, research must be carried out in collaboration with one of the Fund’s 15 partner countries. Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Newton funding will be, of course, a focus of detailed attention in the University over the coming weeks.

Leeds is already well equipped to flourish internationally and well served by Jacqui Brown and her excellent team in the International Office, but the arrival of our new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), Professor Hai-Sui Yu, will provide clear academic leadership and bring a new energy and drive to our international activity. His mix of overseas experience and academic excellence will enable him to work with the University community and overseas partners to enhance our international standing even further.

Vice-Chancellor Sir Alan Langlands

*Center for International Climate and Environmental Research