

Leader column

The promise of summer to come

June is a good month at the University – exams are over for most of our students, the campus is looking at its very best, and there is still the promise of graduation ceremonies and the rest of the summer to come. Progress is also being made on new facilities at the Edward Boyle library, and for the Institute for Transport Studies and the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies.

For some of our students, the opportunities offered during the long summer break will be life-changing. I am sure that the 17 outstanding undergraduates who have won a place on the University's inaugural Leeds to New York Student Leadership Challenge will undoubtedly find the experience unlike anything they have previously encountered. The seven-day programme combines meetings with business people and academics, alumni presentations, workshops and site visits in both Leeds and New York, to investigate the leadership challenges facing these cities. It fits perfectly with our strategic aim of providing students with an outstanding education which equips them "to succeed in a competitive global employment market and to make a difference". Many more will spend time studying abroad, in work placements, supporting research teams in Leeds or on field trips, and volunteering.

Support from the Footsteps Fund has enabled the new opportunity for leadership development, which also responds to a request from our North American alumni to have more direct contact with our students. The programme is an excellent example of how we can pool our resources and strengths to produce something remarkable. Its design and delivery has been enabled through a collaboration between staff from the Alumni & Development Office, Student Careers and Learning Enhancement, 15 of our alumni in the New York area, and Common Purpose, our learning partners who have a successful track record in delivering international leadership development programmes. This challenge is just one element of our excellent Student Leadership Programme but it reinforces the depth of our commitment to students and our determination to equip them with the skills and understanding to develop as effective,



responsible leaders and influencers. At the end of the challenge the students will present their ideas about what makes a successful city to audiences in both New York and Leeds. I'm sure that their reflections and suggestions will be fascinating, and I look forward to seeing them being shared with a wider University public.

Closer to home, June also sees the launch of the Priestley Centre – our new £6m climate centre which, through the power of research and education, will work with international partners to tackle the challenges of ensuring a healthier, more sustainable planet for future generations.

As I write, the World Triathlon Series is about to take place in Leeds, and we can be justly proud that all three of the UK men's team are either alumni – Alistair Brownlee (Sports Science and Physiology 2009) and his brother Jonny (History 2012) – or an undergraduate, Gordon Benson (BSc Nutrition). These three athletes have also been selected for the Rio Olympics. All train at the Leeds Triathlon Centre – which includes our facility The Edge as a key training base – run jointly by ourselves, Leeds Beckett and Leeds City Council. World Triathlon Series athletes Vicky Holland and Non Stanford, two of the likely women's Olympic team, also train at the Centre. Our academics, too, are experts on the triathlon, whether it be the analysing the most successful techniques, dealing with injuries, or advising the athletes on individual performance strategies.

Sport is a serious business – the University understands what a valuable part it can play in the lives of our students and the wider community. One of the distinctive things about our approach to sport is that it is now delivered by a single team – comprising staff from the University and Leeds University Union – housed in one location, making it easier for students to navigate their way through the many excellent opportunities on offer.

As well as improving our service, we continue to invest in our sports facilities. The new boat

house and gym extension are completed and work will soon begin on a cycle track and revamped sports pavilion at Bodington sports ground. The number of our students participating in sport has increased and we hope that this will continue to grow. The University Council recently agreed additional investment to help alleviate some of the cost pressures on students participating in sport, particularly those in teams and organised programmes. This was a gap identified in the Sport Strategy and, by closing it, we aim to improve the experience of those students who are already playing in teams and also ensure that barriers to participation are lowered to increase involvement. I am delighted to say that our progress is being widely recognised; the Times Higher now ranks us first in the Russell Group for sport and fifth in the UK overall.

Work continues on the final phase of the improvement to the Leeds University Union building and – most unusually for a construction project! – it will be completed ahead of the original schedule and is due to open as early as April 2017. When complete, it will provide our students, and the many staff who use the building, with superb new facilities. The refurbishment was brought about in part thanks to the commitment and efforts of successive LUU executive officers, and I would like to thank the 2015-16 outgoing exec team for their contributions. All the officers have played a vital role in bringing the student voice to bear on the business and strategy of the University. I'm very much looking forward to working with the new executive headed by Jack Palmer, the Unions Affairs Officer, and including Melissa Owusu, who was re-elected as Education Officer. We are very fortunate to have such a strong Partnership with LUU and I hope that it will continue to flourish in the year ahead.

Vice-Chancellor Sir Alan Langlands