

Durham Times

Newsbrief

A breath of fresh Eire for professor

A DURHAM University chief has been appointed to lead Ireland's largest university. Professor Andrew Deeks, Durham's Pro Vice Chancellor (Science), will become president of University College Dublin (UCD) in January.

Prof Deeks joined Durham from the University of Western Australia, in Perth, in 2009 and has led Durham in growing its presence on the world stage, particularly in China and Brazil.

He said: "I am very much looking forward to taking up the role. UCD plays a unique role in Irish society and economy."

Dermot Gallagher, chair of UCD's governing authority, said: "Andrew Deeks has an impressive track record of leadership roles in the international university sector. His expertise and knowledge will help us to strengthen our national position while maintaining an active outward-looking focus."

Moreinside

Liquidation woe

Durham County Council has been criticised for allowing a firm it had a controlling interest in to trade while insolvent ... **page 5**

Fire training

The site of the former colliery at Bowburn is to be used for a new fire training centre ... **page 8**

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ISSN 1754-3932



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Iranian political prisoner wants to help develop links with West

by Mark Tallentire

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A FORMER Durham University academic jailed as a political prisoner in his native Iran has been freed and returned to the UK, the *Durham Times* can reveal.

Reza Molavi, a former head of Durham University's Centre for Iranian Studies, has told how he had his passport seized on trying to return to the UK in June 2010, was arrested at his Tehran home the next morning and detained at the notorious Evin Prison. He was repeatedly interrogated and held in solitary confinement in a tiny cell for four months.

In January last year, he was convicted of aiding a "velvet revolution" and jailed for three years, before being released last October. In total, he spent around 15 months behind bars.

But speaking exclusively to the *Durham Times* in London, he refused to condemn the Iranian regime, calling his ordeal a "great opportunity" for "field research".

The 67-year-old now wants to be a bridge between Iran and the West, travelling between the two and teaching university students in his homeland. He said: "I don't want to become bitter. I want to spread goodwill. I want to work to leave them with an impression that they can live with the West in peace and harmony."

Dr Molavi also wants to



BRIDGES: Dr Reza Molavi

use his experiences to inform debate among academics and policy makers.

Secret diplomatic cables from April 2008 released through the controversial Wikileaks website suggested a named Durham University academic, not Dr Molavi, sought £273,000 in US funding to develop contacts in Iran.

Dr Molavi claims he twice refused to be involved because he did not want to be seen as "spying or pimping for some foreign government".

Iranian-born and US-educated, Dr Molavi was in Durham from 2003 to 2010, first as a PhD student and then on the university staff.

He was detained in Tehran in June 2010 having returned home to his ill mother. Plain-clothed agents, who he said were extremely respectful, seized his computers, mobile phones, books and articles and took him to Evin Prison, known to house the

regime's political enemies. There, he was repeatedly interrogated although, he emphasises, never physically abused.

He was kept in a four-metre square cell and it was three months before his wife was allowed to visit him.

However, after being released he was invited to lecture at Tehran University, given his passport back and allowed to leave the country.

He said: "To me it was all an expedition – a fact-finding mission. I look at it as field research. It has given me better understanding of politics in the Middle East and particularly in my home country.

"It gives me the impetus to be of service for peace and harmony – to be a bridge between the Anglo-Saxon countries and my own country.

"And it opened my eyes to how hypocritical and how stupid some of these highly acclaimed professors in Ivy League universities are and how separated they are from reality."

Dr Molavi's temporary return to the UK comes as hopes are rising in the West of a thawing of relations with Tehran following the election as president of reformist-backed cleric Hassan Rouhani, who will take office on Saturday, August 3.

A Durham University spokeswoman said it was very pleased Dr Molavi was safe and well.



Gospel fun for young – but that's shallot

CHILDREN enjoyed a morning of medieval-themed games in the surrounds of Durham Cathedral.

Youngsters took part in the Marvellous Monastic Games event in the cathedral's cloisters.

Games included Cuthbert's Onions, Leaving Lindisfarne and Escape the Vikings.

The event was part of a programme of family fun to celebrate the return of the Lindisfarne Gospels to Durham this summer. There will also be story-telling, arts and crafts, lectures, hands-on talks, calligraphy, jewellery making and more.

Upstairs at Durham University's Palace Green Library, where the Gospels exhibition is being staged until September 30, families can enjoy the free-to-enter interactive Wolfson Gallery, where they can dress up as monks, learn how the Gospels were made and hear stories of by-gone eras.

Meanwhile, ticket sales for the Lindisfarne Gospels exhibition have now topped 40,000 – half-way to the 80,000 organisers were planning for. For more information and full listings, visit lindisfarnegospels.com.

Playing Cuthbert's Onion are (from left) Sadie Johnson (six), Irish Williams and Casey Lane (both five).

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