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## **UCT's first-ever female engineering dean's term ends**

After 10 years of service, Professor Alison Lewis is stepping down as dean of the [Faculty of Engineering & the Built Environment \(EBE\)](#) at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Professor Lewis' term comes to an end in accordance with the UCT policy limiting deans to just two terms. She is not retiring, but returning to the Department of Chemical Engineering, where she will continue her research through the Crystallization and Precipitation Research Unit.

Professor Lewis was appointed dean on 1 June 2015, becoming the first woman in the faculty's history to hold that position.

From the start, she prioritised academic excellence, meaningful transformation and positioning the faculty to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving world.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela said: "Throughout her tenure as dean, Professor Lewis led with integrity, thoughtfulness and a deep commitment to the institution. She made difficult decisions carefully, created space for new ideas and stayed focused on the long-term development of people and programmes."

"We thank her for her leadership and service as the dean of EBE and are glad that she will remain part of the university community through her continuing work in the Department of Chemical Engineering and her research group."

One of Lewis' earliest initiatives was increasing the representation of black South African academics, and by 2021, the number of full-time black South African academics in the faculty had risen from 15% to 28%. A significant portion of this increase included women.

In 2020, Lewis launched the Faculty Academic Incubator, a space designed to support early-career academics through mentorship and peer learning. This programme continues to help develop and retain talent within the faculty.

Beyond her faculty role, Lewis made important contributions to the university's strategic planning. She served as chair of the Vice-Chancellor's Futures Think Tank, a university-wide initiative focused on interrogating how UCT should adapt to global changes. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, she established the Infrastructure Think Tank within EBE to help transition beyond emergency remote teaching.

One of her key projects has been the EBE Curriculum Review. This ongoing faculty-wide process focuses on redesigning undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to ensure they stay academically rigorous and socially relevant. The project covers curriculum content, student success, assessment methods, graduate qualities and efforts toward transformation and decolonisation.

Professor Lewis also led long-term strategic planning. In 2022, the faculty began developing the EBE [Vision 2050 strategy](#), which expands on the university's [Vision 2030](#). Vision 2050 is guided by nine strategic goals, including fostering inclusion, promoting digital equity and supporting sustainable innovation. This effort was further advanced through the Future Dreamers programme, launched in 2024, which brought together young academics to help shape the faculty's future direction.

Research has also expanded during her tenure as dean. In 2023, 23 faculty researchers were listed among Stanford University's top 2% of scientists worldwide. Several staff members received new or renewed NRF A-ratings.

Professor Lewis' work has gained recognition both nationally and internationally. Her awards include the Water Research Commission Knowledge Tree and Legends Awards, the Africa Water Leadership Award and the National Science and Technology Forum Engineering Capacity Development Award. The Department of Science and Technology honoured her twice as a Distinguished Woman in Science. In 2024, she was elected as an International Member of the US National Academy of Engineering and became a Fellow of the World Academy of Sciences for the advancement of science in developing countries.

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