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UCT's Emerita Professor Harrison elected Fellow of Royal Academy of Engineering

Emeritus Professor Sue Harrison. Photo: Lerato Maduna.

University of Cape Town's (UCT) Emerita Professor Sue Harrison has been elected an International Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng), recognising her distinguished contribution to engineering research, innovation and capacity development.

Emerita Professor Harrison is among 75 leading figures in engineering and technology elected to the Academy's Fellowship this year, including a record 24 women. Her election comes as the academy celebrates its 50th anniversary.

The Fellowship recognises engineers whose work has made a significant contribution to the profession and to society. Harrison joins an international community of more than 1 700 Fellows working across academia, industry, entrepreneurship and public policy.

Harrison said: "I am truly delighted to be elected as an International Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering. UCT has been the centre of most of my contributions, which has resulted in this election to such a prestigious academy.

"My career at UCT has focused on the value of building strong research communities at the interface of new knowledge creation and impact – in industry, society and for the environment - and creating opportunities for the next generation of engineers and scientists. This Fellowship is a recognition not only of an individual career, but of the many colleagues, students and collaborators who have contributed to that journey.

"I look forward to continuing to contribute to the global engineering community and to strengthening connections between engineering research, innovation and its societal impact and industry contribution."

Harrison spent three decades at the UCT, where she built an internationally recognised research programme in bioprocess engineering. She founded the Centre for Bioprocess Engineering Research and served as its director for more than two decades, while also holding the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Research Chair in Bioprocess Engineering. She was also founding director of the interdisciplinary research institute, Futue Water, and contributed actively to the conceptualisation and work of the Minerals to Metals Initiative.

Her research has brought together chemical engineering, biotechnology and microbiology to address complex challenges including sustainable mineral processing, resource recovery, water treatment, bioremediation and the development of more sustainable bioprocesses.

Harrison also made a substantial contribution to research leadership at UCT, serving as Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation from 2019 until 2024. In that position she led work to strengthen research quality and impact, international partnerships, innovation and research translation, postgraduate development and interdisciplinary research.

Her contribution has extended well beyond her own research. During her UCT career she supervised more than 155 postgraduate students to completion, including 38 PhD and 117 MSc students, hosted and mentored some 40 postdoctoral researchers and played a significant role in developing research capacity and supporting the next generation of engineers and scientists.

She is currently the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation at the University of Queensland.

According to the Royal Academy of Engineering, this year's Fellows are contributing to advances across areas including clean energy, AI, medicine and public health, while also helping to widen participation in engineering and providing expert advice to policymakers.

The 2026 cohort reflects the Academy's Fellowship Fit for the Future initiative, launched in 2020 to broaden the range of backgrounds represented within its Fellowship. More than 50% of Fellows elected during the initiative came from underrepresented groups, and the approach has now been embedded into the Academy's ongoing Fellowship processes.

The new Fellows will be formally admitted to the Academy at a ceremony in London on 19 October 2026.

Notes to editors

About the Royal Academy of Engineering
The Royal Academy of Engineering creates and leads a community of outstanding experts and innovators to engineer better lives. As a charity and a Fellowship, the academy delivers public benefit from excellence in engineering and technology and convene leading businesspeople, entrepreneurs, innovators and academics across the profession. As a National Academy, the academy provides leadership for engineering and technology, and independent, expert advice to policymakers in the UK and beyond.

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