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UCT academics earn prestigious international fellowships

Several University of Cape Town (UCT) academics have received a series of prestigious national and international fellowships, recognising their contributions to research, innovation and the advancement of knowledge across a range of disciplines.

The most recent honours include elections to the Royal Society of South Africa and the Royal Academy of Engineering, reflecting the depth and diversity of scholarship at UCT and its contribution to global research.

Five UCT academics were announced as Fellows of the Royal Society of South Africa on 24 October 2026. They are Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela; Associate Professor Susan Cunningham of the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology; Professor Graeme Meintjes of the Department of Medicine; Professor Sharon Prince of the Department of Human Biology; and Professor Mark Solms of the Department of Psychology.

The election recognises distinguished contributions across disciplines, including ornithology, medicine, human biology, psychology and public health.

Commenting on the significance of these achievements, Professor Moshabela said the recognition reflected not only individual academic excellence, but also the collective effort that makes outstanding scholarship possible.

"These fellowships affirm the strength and international standing of UCT's research community. They recognise years of sustained contributions to knowledge and to the development of the fields in which our colleagues work.

"Academic distinction is rarely the product of individual effort alone. It is nurtured through research teams, students, mentors, collaborators, professional and support staff, institutional investment and international partnerships. Recognition may be conferred on individuals, but the conditions that make excellence possible are collective," he said.

The Royal Society of South Africa recognition adds to a series of notable international distinctions earned by UCT academics in 2026.

On 24 September, Emerita Professor Sue Harrison was announced as one of 75 new Fellows of the Royal Academy of Engineering. The 2026 cohort includes a record 24 women. The fellowship recognises Professor Harrison's distinguished contributions to engineering research, innovation and capacity development. During her three decades at UCT, she established an internationally recognised research programme in bioprocess engineering.

Earlier this year, Emerita Professor Val Mizrahi was elected to the United States National Academy of Sciences in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the biological sciences and tuberculosis research. Membership of the academy is reserved for scientists recognised for distinguished and continuing achievements in original research. She joins UCT colleague Professor Kelly Chibale, who was elected to the academy in 2025.

Professor Chibale has also received further international recognition for his contributions to medicinal chemistry, drug discovery and scientific capacity development. Earlier this year, he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Society of Chemistry, its highest honour for a member of the chemical sciences community. The recognition highlights his work in advancing African-led research and strengthening scientific capacity.

In a further distinction, the University of Bologna in Italy awarded Professor Chibale an honorary doctorate in Biotechnology, Biocomputational, Pharmaceutical and Pharmacological Sciences on 23 September 2026.

Professor Moshabela said the achievements demonstrated the breadth of expertise within the university and the importance of connecting academic excellence with societal impact.

"Our excellence must remain ambitious, but also purposeful. We must pursue research that expands the boundaries of knowledge while contributing to a more just, sustainable and inclusive society.

"We must create opportunities for talented people from diverse backgrounds to participate in and shape that research, while supporting the next generation so that today's achievements become the foundation for tomorrow's discoveries," he said.

He added that the recognition of UCT academics reinforced the university's commitment to its African purpose and global reach.

"These achievements give us confidence in the intellectual strength of our academic community and remind us of the contribution that African scholarship can make to

addressing challenges and advancing knowledge around the world," Professor Moshabela said.

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