

# Prof Don A Cowan



## Biography

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Don Cowan was educated (BSc, MSc, PhD) at the University of Waikato (New Zealand) and completed a 4-year period of postdoctoral research under the supervision of Professor Roy Daniel before moving to a Lectureship at University College London (UK) in 1985. After 16 years in London he was appointed to the Chair of Microbiology and Head of the Department of Biotechnology at the University of the Western Cape (RSA), where he established the Institute for Microbial Ecology and Metagenomics. In 2012 he moved to the University of Pretoria where he is a Professor in the Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology, and is currently the Director of both the **Genomics Research Institute** and the **Centre for Microbial Ecology and Genomics**.

Don's research is in the fields of *microbial ecology*, *microbial genomics* and *applied microbiology*, where he and his team use modern 'omics' methods to understand the diversity and function of microorganisms in different environments. Much of his research focuses on the microbiology of extreme environments, including hot (Namib) and cold (Antarctic) desert soils, but he also supervises research projects investigating the rhizospheric zones of economic crop plant species, and is currently leading the pan-African *African Soil Microbiome* project. He works with many other research laboratories in South Africa and across the world. Don has published some 450 research papers, review articles and book chapters and sits on the Editorial Boards of 10 international journals. He has a Scopus H-index of 64.

In the course of his career, Don has trained and graduated 50 PhD students and 52 MSc students. As Director of the Centre for Microbial Ecology and Genomics, he currently supervises a small research team of 1 research fellow, 2 postdoctoral researchers and 5 PhDs.

Don also holds the posts of Professor Emeritus at the University of the Western Cape, was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa in 2007, as a Member of the Academy of Sciences of South Africa in 2008, and as an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 2009. He was awarded the University of the Western Cape Vice-Rector's Award for Research Excellence in 2008 and the South African Society for Microbiology Medal for Research Excellence in 2009. He is a past President of the Royal Society of South Africa. He received the National Science and Technology Forum *Capacity Development* award in 2014. In April 2015 he received the University of Pretoria's highest research award, the Chancellor's Medal. He was elected as a Fellow of African Academy of Sciences in March 2017. More recently, he was awarded an NRF A1 rating, the 2019 Royal Society of South Africa's John F.W. Herschel medal, the University of Pretoria's 2020 Exceptional Supervisor's Award and the 2021 South African Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Gold Medal.