

Vita Sanderson, Hon DSc

Thursday 18 July 2024, pm

Vice-Chancellor

It is a great pleasure this afternoon to introduce our honorary graduand, VITA SANDERSON, an award-winning structural engineer who has used her knowledge and expertise in humanitarian projects around the world.

Vita is currently a Senior Consultant with Arup International Development. Since joining the company in 2018, she has worked on projects to improve safety in school facilities globally. These have included a large retrofit programme in schools in Western Nepal; research work with University of Bristol on low-cost seismic construction for schools; a large school reconstruction programme in Peru; the development of school design projects for Bhutan's Ministry of Education, and work in Zimbabwe after Cyclone Idai. In response to the Covid Pandemic, Vita led the development of 'guidance for implementing rapidly deployed covid treatment and isolation centres in low resource contexts (including 'plug-in' hospitals) called Carebox. She has also recently been working with partners such as the World Health Organisation and the International office of Migration to provide remote support to their work in the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar,

Bangladesh – the world’s largest refugee camp. Before joining Arup, working for front- line humanitarian agencies, she managed the construction of a new hospital project in Agok, South Sudan, and from 2016-2017 was a district engineer in Rasuwa, Nepal, where she managed the construction of 25 Transitional Learning Centres being built as part of the post-earthquake reconstruction works. And in 2013, she worked for ACCORD, an alliance of European companies to undertake the structural inspection of many garment factories in Bangladesh, following the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory.

Since qualifying as a Chartered Engineer in 2015 (she graduated with an MEng from Imperial College London in 2011), Vita has spent her professional life working on projects to improve the lives and education of people affected by conflict, natural disasters and by the Covid Pandemic. Her work has taken her into challenging, even hostile, environments. In 2021, she was awarded the Smeaton Medal from the Smeatonian Society of Civil Engineers – an award that recognises engineers in early or mid-career who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in hostile environments. It is clear that Vita’s passion for humanitarian work extends beyond her purely professional role: she also serves as a Board Trustee for Médecins Sans Frontières UK (MSF UK) and sits on its Operation Centre Amsterdam (OCA) Council.

I have had the distinct privilege of knowing Vita since 2018, when she joined our team here at the School of Engineering as an invited lecturer of our MSc Humanitarian Engineering programme. Since then, she is inspiring our students to embrace sustainability as a cornerstone of their work and to make meaningful contributions to global challenges.

Vita Sanderson's career exemplifies the synergy between technical expertise in engineering and humanitarian dedication. She is a role model for aspiring engineers and professionals, showcasing the profound impact that one individual can have on the betterment of society. We are delighted to welcome Vita today for the award of her honorary degree.

Vice-Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, VITA SANDERSON.