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Three young UCT researchers selected for new science academy

Three University of Cape Town scientists, all in their early to mid-30s, are among the 20 founder members of the new South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS) - selected from almost 150 nominations.

Dr Shadreck Chirikure of the Department of Archaeology, Associate Professor Genevieve Langdon of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, and Dr Jeff Murugan of the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics were inaugurated into SAYAS at its launch. The event was hosted by the Deputy Minister for Science and Technology, Derek Hanekom, in Pretoria on 27 September 2011. "The group was selected from among the best scientific minds in South Africa and represents a diverse range of talent in terms of race, gender and scientific discipline." SAYAS said in a statement.

SAYAS is designed to bridge the gap between the more senior Academy of Science of South Africa, and the up-and-coming young scientists who are likely to be future leaders in their fields. It will give a voice to young scientists on national and international issues, and create a platform for them to speak on policy decisions.

Dr Shadreck Chirikure (33) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology. His main research interests are in artefact studies and heritage management in contemporary Africa.

Dr Chirikure said: "For so long, young researchers have been excluded from charting the country's destiny. SAYAS is an opportunity to put this behind us, by showing the world those young South African researchers can distil solutions that can move the country forward in topical issues such as climate change, employment creation and sound governance."

Associate Professor Langdon's research focuses on blast performance of novel lightweight materials such as honeycombs and foams. "Now still in its infancy, the academy will need to gain ground and credibility, which is where the young

members can contribute," said Langdon (34). "Our first priority is to establish SAYAS as a credible and effectively functioning organisation, which means applying our minds, raising some funding and identifying a strategy for projects and involvement across the country."

Dr Jeff Murugan (35) is a lecturer in the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics. His research interests include string theory, quantum gravity and neurophysics. "I guess there's a greater sense of responsibility," Murugan said of the nomination. "And that there were only 20 founding members selected from nearly 150 nominations from across the country means that this is something of a vote of confidence."

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