

Susan Morrison, Honorary Doctorate
Laureation by Dawn Smith, Public Engagement Manager
Thursday 30 October 2025 at The Usher Hall, Edinburgh

Vice Chancellor, it is my privilege to present Susan Morrison for the honorary degree of Doctor of the University.

Susan is a cornerstone of Edinburgh's cultural scene. She has made her mark as a writer, broadcaster, historian, and comedian and also as a daughter, wife and mother. Across all these roles, she has championed the voices of underrepresented people—especially women—always with her own distinctive style and wit.

Born in Glasgow, in a home where books, learning, and museum visits were treasured, Susan developed a lifelong love of stories and people. She graduated from the University of Stirling in 1980 and today lives in Leith—just a stone's throw from the Royal Yacht Britannia, a fitting location for someone with a deep passion for the Titanic.

After an early career at BT—where she was among the first in the company to have an email address—Susan embarked on a bold new path in 1996 as a stand-up comedian. She became one of the first stars of The Stand Comedy Club at a time when comedy was not always welcoming to women. She played an important role in opening doors for female performers and went on to serve, from 2013 to 2021, as a board member of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, the organisation that underpins the world's largest arts festival.

A staunch believer in lifelong learning, Susan founded *Previously... Scotland's History Festival* in 2012 and continues to lead walking tours that share alternative stories of the city she calls home. Her encyclopaedic knowledge of Edinburgh ensures that there are few places or people in this city without a story she can bring to life.

Here at Napier, we have benefitted enormously from Susan's curiosity and her gift for sharing knowledge. Not many years ago, when academics mostly communicated with the public from behind a lectern, Susan championed a more engaging and creative approach. Her vision has enriched generations of researchers and transformed our university's public engagement.

In 2011 she co-founded Edinburgh's *Bright Club*, giving researchers the chance to share their work with audiences at The Stand Comedy Club—which The Guardian once described as “the thinking person's comedy night.” In 2013 she helped launch the *Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas*, enabling researchers to bring their work to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. This past August, Napier academics took part in 21 shows as part of the new *Provocateurs* programme—initiatives in which Susan's guidance and energy have been central. These projects are ambitious, innovative, and internationally recognised.

I am delighted that today we are joined by some of the many Napier researchers who have flourished thanks to Susan's encouragement and mentorship.

Edinburgh and Napier are richer for Susan's love of stories, her commitment to people, and her generosity in sharing both.

Vice Chancellor, in recognition of her major contribution to Scottish comedy and culture, and to public engagement with research, I invite you to confer on Susan Morrison the honorary degree of Doctor of the University.