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UCT Professor honoured with OBE for groundbreaking infectious disease research

Professor Robert J Wilkinson, an honorary Professor in the University of Cape Town's (UCT) [Department of Medicine](#), has been named an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE). This prestigious accolade, announced in the United Kingdom's New Year Honours List 2025, is awarded "for services to infectious disease research."

This honour underscores the global impact of Professor Wilkinson's work in tackling one of the world's most pressing health challenges: tuberculosis (TB). His pioneering research into the complex interplay between the immune system and TB has advanced its diagnosis, management, and outcomes, contributing significantly to global health.

Reflecting on this achievement, Professor Wilkinson said, "Although awards are made to individuals, in my case, this reflects my fortune in working with hundreds of excellent people over many years to foster high-quality research and a good research culture."

"In my acceptance of this award, I ask that these colleagues interpret this award as an endorsement of their great contribution in tackling infectious diseases in Africa," he added.

UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela expressed immense pride in this recognition, "Professor Wilkinson's OBE is a testament to his remarkable contributions to science and humanity. His dedication to infectious disease research has not only saved lives but has also elevated Africa's role in solving global health challenges. At UCT, we are immensely proud to have him as part of our community, and this award reflects the values of excellence and impact that we strive for. His work has enhanced the quality of life of individuals and communities and addresses key challenges facing society. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Professor Wilkinson and his collaborators on this well-deserved recognition."

Antony Phillipson, British High Commissioner to South Africa, also commented: "I am delighted to see that Professor Wilkinson has been awarded this honour by His Majesty King Charles. The science and research links between South Africa and the UK are a key pillar of our modern-day partnership, and he has done much to deepen and strengthen them

through his extensive work on infectious diseases. Many congratulations from us all in the UK in South Africa network.”

As a career scientist, Professor Wilkinson’s influence spans over three decades of groundbreaking research. His illustrious career began in 1993, and he has since authored over 400 scientific papers, with more than 26,000 citations to his name. His extensive contributions to academia have been recognised with numerous accolades, including:

- An A1 South African National Research Foundation rating,
- The South African Medical Research Council Gold Medal,
- An International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease scientific prize,
- Election to The Academy of Medical Sciences (United Kingdom).

At UCT, Professor Wilkinson’s legacy includes the establishment of the Clinical Infectious Diseases Research Initiative (2008–2017), which transformed into the [Wellcome Centre for Infectious Diseases Research in Africa \(CIDRI-Africa\)](#). Under his leadership, this initiative has become a Wellcome-funded Discovery Research Platform for Infection, contributing to UCT’s position as Africa’s leading hub for infectious disease research.

In addition to his research, Professor Wilkinson has championed science capacity building in Africa. He has supervised or co-supervised numerous postdoctoral scientists and doctoral students, most of whom are women and many from underrepresented groups.

Professor Wilkinson’s OBE is a powerful affirmation of [UCT’s Vision 2030](#), which aspires to "unleash human potential to create a fair and just society." His achievements should inspire a new generation of scientists and reinforces UCT’s role as a global leader in research excellence.

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