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UCT crowned South Africa's coolest university

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has been named the coolest university in a retrospective review of the past decade of the Sunday Times GenNext awards, now in their 21st edition. The award recognises UCT's enduring appeal to South Africa's youth and its status as a leading institution in education, innovation and campus culture.

The annual Sunday Times GenNext survey is regarded as the country's premier measure of what young South Africans find trendy and aspirational. This year's retrospective drew on data from 2015 to 2024, highlighting a decade of evolving youth sentiment across brand categories. The research focused on the top five brands in each category, providing a comprehensive view of what resonates with South Africans aged eight to 30.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela said: "How cool is that... being named the coolest university by South Africa's youth. Now that is something to clock. It's a reflection of UCT's commitment not only to academic excellence but also the continued effort to foster an environment where creativity, community and engagement with societal issues are celebrated. I am proud to know that we are a university that inspires and resonates with the next generation. We must lean into this resonance and allow young people shape their experience of UCT."

Professor Moshabela added that UCT's recognition – which is also an acknowledgement of the efforts of staff, students and alumni – underscored its position as a university that blends academic rigour with creativity, inclusivity and a forward-looking spirit, ensuring it remains both relevant and inspiring to the youth of South Africa.

UCT's recognition as the coolest university also reflects more than its academic reputation. Students cite the university's vibrant campus life, innovative teaching approaches, strong student communities, diverse cultural and social activities, and active engagement with societal issues as key factors that set it apart. From world-class research facilities and dynamic student societies to public lectures and arts initiatives, UCT continues to create an environment where students can thrive academically and personally.

The award comes on the heels of another significant achievement. In the 2026 Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, UCT achieved its highest global ranking in a decade, placing 150th worldwide. This achievement underscores UCT's consistent excellence

in research, teaching and global engagement. It highlights the university's ability to combine world-class scholarship with a campus experience that resonates with young people both locally and internationally.

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