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UCT achieves best THE ranking performance in a decade

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has risen to 147th in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2027.

The announcement was made at the official live reveal of the 2027 rankings, hosted at UCT on Tuesday, 29 September 2026. UCT is placed 147th out of 2 297 ranked universities. This represents a rise of 17 places from 2026, and marks UCT's highest-ranking position in the past six years.

The number of ranked universities increased from 2 191 in 2026, yet UCT moved from approximately the top 7.5% of ranked institutions to the top 6.3%. The strongest drivers of the ranking improvement were Research Reputation, Teaching Reputation and Research Strength.

UCT remains the top-ranked university on the continent. The result provides valuable affirmation of the progress the university is making and the international standing it continues to build.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela said: "This is an achievement of which our entire university community can be proud. It reflects the collective efforts of our students, staff, alumni and partners, whose commitment to excellence continues to strengthen UCT's contribution locally, nationally and globally.

"We welcome the great news; and remain committed to the quality of the education we provide, the research and innovation we advance, the opportunities we create for our students, and the contribution we make to society."

Overall performance context
UCT recorded an overall score of 62.4, improving from 60.8 in 2026. This achievement represents the university's highest overall score recorded across the 2016–2027 period.

Teaching
UCT achieved a score of 42.2 for 2027, up from 39.4 in 2026. This indicator evaluates the learning environment, staff-to-student ratios, doctorate output, institutional income and global teaching reputation. Teaching represents UCT's most improved indicator over the last six years, which reflects ongoing institutional investment in high-quality pedagogy, academic capacity and learning resources. Teaching reputation was the second largest driver of UCT's improvement, after Research Reputation (moved from score of 19.2 to 24.5).

Research Environment
In this metric, UCT moved to 49.9 for 2027 from 46.7 in 2026, marking the largest single-year score increase across all pillars. Assessing research reputation, research income and scholarly productivity, UCT's score on this indicator has steadily strengthened over the years to reach a multi-year peak for 2027. This underscores expanding research output and continued international standing among peer research institutions, with Research Reputation being the highest mover for 2027, its score rising from 19.2 to 2.5.

Research Quality
UCT scored 88.4 in Research Quality for 2027, up from 87.8 in 2026. Measuring citation impact, research strength, excellence and global influence, Research Quality remains UCT's strongest overall indicator. This performance reflects the deep real-world reach, quality and citation weight of UCT's scholarly publishing across disciplines. The biggest upward move in this indicator was for Research Strength. UCT's Research Strength score increased from 66.5 to 72.3, reflecting an improvement in the 75th-percentile field-weighted citation impact of its research. This suggests stronger citation performance across a substantial portion of UCT's research output, rather than simply an increase in the number of exceptionally highly cited papers. This also suggests that the citation performance of a broader segment of UCT's research output improved relative to the global distribution.

Industry
UCT scored 79.4 in Industry for 2027, compared to 84.8 in 2026. This pillar measures an institution's ability to help industry with innovations, inventions and consultancy, alongside patent outputs. Over the past six years, this indicator has shown marked variance: following a sharp drop from 89.0 in 2021 to 53.3 in 2023, performance rallied back to 84.8 in 2026

before stabilising at 79.4. For 2027, the drop was caused by a decline in Industry Income (a drop of 12.7 score points), with Patents rising by two points. While reflecting strong industry partnerships and commercial relevance, it highlights an area for tactical focus to maintain stable translation of research into industry funding as well as patents.

International Outlook

In the International Outlook pillar, UCT recorded 77.7 for 2027, a slight movement from 77.9 in 2026. This indicator captures the proportion of international students, international staff and cross-border research collaborations. While remaining a clear pillar of institutional strength, UCT's performance signals a strategic focus area for enhancing international talent recruitment, internationalisation efforts and global research network building.

Moshabela remarked: "Our steady progress, from 180th in 2025 to 164th in 2026 and joint 147th in the 2027 rankings, is particularly encouraging. It demonstrates what can be achieved when the UCT community works with a shared commitment to excellence, impact and transformation.

"I extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to every member of the UCT community who has contributed to this achievement."

He concluded that UCT celebrates this milestone while remaining focused on the work ahead – strengthening its academic excellence, expanding its global impact, supporting students and staff, and ensuring that UCT continues to serve South Africa and the world with distinction.

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