

Stellenbosch University improves in 2023 THE World Universities Ranking

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Stellenbosch University (SU) improved on three of the five performance indicators used in compiling the [2023 Times Higher Education \(THE\) World Universities Ranking \(WUR\)](#) that was announced on Wednesday, 12 October 2022.

SU is ranked in the category 251–300 and shares the second position with Wits in South Africa. Approximately 1,800 universities have been ranked on the latest THE WUR.

An authoritative ranking of the world's best universities, the THE World University Rankings are the only global performance tables that judge research-intensive universities across all their core missions: teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and international outlook.

Performance indicators are grouped into five areas: Teaching (the learning environment); Research (volume, income and reputation); Citations (research influence); International outlook (staff, students and research); and Industry income (knowledge transfer).

Besides the increase in its overall score, SU improved its position on the indicators for Citations, Research and Teaching. The most significant improvement was in the citation score with an increase of 4,4%. With this increase, the citation score improved from the previous (2022) score of 78,7 to the 2023 score of 82,2.

The University's research and teaching scores improved from 35,7 to 36,9 and 30,3 to 30,5 respectively.

According to THE WUR, the research influence indicator looks at universities' role in spreading new knowledge and ideas. The average number of times a university's published work is cited by scholars globally is of particular importance in this regard. "Citations help to show us how much each university is contributing to the sum of human knowledge: They tell us whose research has stood out, has been picked up and built on by other scholars and, most importantly, has been shared around the global scholarly community to expand the boundaries of our understanding, irrespective of discipline."

Prof Hester Klopper, deputy vice-chancellor: Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs, says that SU's steady and improved performance on the THE WUR strengthens the University's reputation as one of the leading research-intensive universities in the world. "Our consistent performance on various international rankings is testimony to the institution's vision of being 'Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society'. The fact remains that universities on the African continent's social, economic and political contexts differ vastly from that of universities in high-income countries. SU's continued presence on established rankings such as THE WUR is an achievement of note," she said.

Over the last few years, SU has consistently ranked among the best tertiary institutions in the world on global university rankings such as the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings, the Times Higher Education Emerging Economies University Rankings, the Academic Ranking of World Universities (also known as the Shanghai Rankings), and the Center for World University Rankings.

She adds that the improvement in SU's citation scores speaks volumes for the international quality of the research outputs of the University's scientists. "Some of the institution's most eminent scientists also regularly appear on the [Highly Cited Researchers](#) list from the Web of Science Group, which features the most influential researchers in the world who produce multiple papers ranking in the top 1% by citations for their field and year of publication. The THE WUR's 'Research' category considers a university's reputation for research excellence among its peers, the income it generates for world-

class research, and its ability to get papers published in quality peer-reviewed journals.”

SU’s improved research score could be attributed to, among others, its strategic emphasis on ‘Research for Impact’ (a core strategic theme), prestigious research grants and national science awards obtained, collaboration with national and international higher education institutions and industry partners, the contribution of its scientists to international policy and governance bodies, and its growing cohort of NRF-rated researchers.

“The University boasts 494 NRF-rated researchers, 20 of whom are A-rated. A-rated researchers are recognised by their peers as the leading international scholars in their field for the high quality and impact of recent research outputs.”

Based on 2020 data (data for 2021 is still being processed by the Department of Higher Education and Training), SU produced the highest number of book publications, the second highest number of conference proceedings and the third highest per-capita research output. SU is placed third in South Africa in terms of journal articles, books, chapters in books and conference proceedings produced.

The ‘Teaching’ category is underpinned by the annually-run Academic Reputation Survey that examines the perceived prestige of institutions in teaching and research. As well as giving a sense of how committed an institution is to nurturing the next generation of academics, a high proportion of postgraduate research students also suggests the provision of teaching at the highest level that is thus attractive to graduates and effective at developing them.

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