

## NEWS RELEASE

### UP's Prof Michael Pepper ranked number one Biology and Biochemistry scientist in SA



*Professor Michael Pepper.*

PRETORIA – The [University of Pretoria's](#) (UP's) Professor Michael Pepper has been ranked the best Biology and Biochemistry Scientist in South Africa by leading global educational platform [Research.com](#).

Prof Pepper is the Director of UP's [Institute for Cellular and Molecular Medicine](#), Director of the [South African Medical Research Council Extramural Unit for Stem Cell Research and Therapy](#), and Research Professor in the [Department of Immunology](#) in UP's [Faculty of Health Sciences](#).

"I am grateful for this recognition, but see it mostly as a reflection of the very talented people I have had the privilege of working with," Prof Pepper said. "I am thankful for the passion and dedication they have shown for the work we do, without which this recognition would not have been forthcoming."

This third annual Research.com ranking of the best scholars in the discipline of Biology and Biochemistry was created using data derived from various sources, and is based on a researcher's D-index (Discipline H-index),

which includes exclusive publications and citation data for an examined discipline. Prof Pepper attained a D-index of 91, with 31 436 citations and 337 publications. His world ranking position is 1 769.

“This achievement directly reflects the shared vision and foresight that UP senior management, particularly in the Executive and Faculty, have had regarding the importance of the field we work in to the well-being of our people,” he said. “South Africa is the most exciting place on the planet to conduct biomedical research. Amongst the many contributing factors is the great genetic diversity of our people. In addition, the high burden of disease, although detrimental from the patient’s perspective, provides unparalleled opportunities for meaningful research.”

After studying medicine at the University of Cape Town and beginning postgraduate studies immediately after his internship, Prof Pepper left South Africa to continue his PhD in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was involved in vascular medicine as a clinician for a few years, while teaching and doing research in Geneva. Upon his return to South Africa, he joined UP in an honorary capacity in 2005, with full-time work on the Institute for Cellular and Molecular Medicine (ICMM) beginning in 2008. The Institute was formally inaugurated in 2015.

“One of my goals has been to generate intellectual property, with the purpose of using it as a focus around which to build biotech start-up companies,” he said. “The reason for this is to be able to translate our research findings into tangible outputs such as services and products. As such I have been involved in the establishment of several biotech companies.”

When asked about the ingredients for success, he said, “These are twofold: hard work, and the ability to adapt. Our circumstances are dynamic, constantly evolving, and it is critical in this ever-changing environment to be able to adapt. The notions of multidisciplinary and translation are also critical if our work is to have an impact. We have aspired to both, and our focus on bio-entrepreneurship in particular reflects the latter.”

In terms of advice for upcoming scientists for attaining success in their chosen fields, Prof Pepper said that he has recently crystallised his thoughts on learning. “If you want to learn, you must be teachable. Being teachable requires humility and all that this implies; it means understanding that your teachers have many – but not all – the answers. They are not perfect and do make mistakes. It includes communication, and letting your teachers know what you are feeling and experiencing; and lastly, it means knowing that it is up to you to remain motivated and receptive.”

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## **ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the

best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)