



The judges noted that there were a number of strong entries in this category, but an initiative by University College London to test a new treatment for tuberculosis in Africa “stood out for the quality of its research and the international collaboration that it entailed”.

TB still leads to about 1.4 million deaths across the world each year, according to the World Health Organisation, despite treatment being effective and cheap. The problem is a lack of quick, accurate diagnosis. The UCL project set out to test the effectiveness of new diagnostic technology in Tanzania and Zambia. The test was found to be simple to use, gave a result within two hours, and could also detect drug-resistant forms of TB.

Medical research in Africa is still dogged by a “colonial mindset”, according to those working on the project, with publications about the continent routinely led by non-African scientists. But this project aimed to offer a “new model” for collaboration with African countries, providing training and capacity development to those involved.

The project was part of a broader TB testing network that linked 12 African institutions with 11 universities in Europe, and focused in training African scientist.

“Tuberculosis is a global emergency that has needed a breakthrough badly. That breakthrough is now at hand thanks to this year’s winning entry,” the award judges said. “The sheer persistence of those collaborating means that a faster, more reliable way of testing TB is now available – and it represents real hope for sufferers and those attempting to halt its spread.”