

Professor David Nutt is the winner of the 2013 John Maddox Prize for Standing up for Science.

The former UK government chief drugs advisor **Professor David Nutt** has been awarded the international prize¹ for courage in promoting science and evidence on a matter of public interest, despite facing difficulty and hostility in doing so. The judges² awarded the prize to Professor Nutt in recognition of the impact his thinking and actions have had in influencing evidence-based classification of drugs, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the world, and his continued courage and commitment to rational debate, despite opposition and public criticism.

Professor Nutt is the Edmond J Safra Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London. He was named chairman of the UK Government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) in May 2008. His role was to make scientific recommendations to government ministers on classification of illegal drugs based on the harm they can cause. In 2009 Professor Nutt was dismissed from his role at the ACMD by Home Secretary Alan Johnson after speaking out about the Government's policies on drugs being at odds with the evidence. Concerns among the scientific community following Professor Nutt's dismissal led to the creation of the Principles for the Treatment of Independent Scientific Advice³, which are now part of the Ministerial Code.

The Prize is a joint initiative of the science journal Nature, the Kohn Foundation, and the charity Sense About Science. The late Sir John Maddox⁴, FRS, was editor of Nature for 22 years and a founding trustee of Sense About Science.

Professor David Nutt: "Science is arguably the defining characteristic of humanity. It therefore is imperative that scientists play their full role in all aspects of human life. Being awarded this prize gives me the confidence to continue to do what's right, and hopefully will inspire others to follow suit."

Professor Colin Blakemore, Universities of London and Oxford, and judge: "The 2013 Prize recognises Professor Nutt's exceptional strength of character and his personal commitment to the open presentation of scientific evidence. In circumstances that would have

humiliated and silenced most people, David Nutt continued to affirm the importance of evidence in understanding the harms of drugs and in developing drug policy. He took personal risk to his reputation in the name of sound science and in defending the right of researchers to present scientific opinion publicly. Policy makers are, of course, not compelled to follow scientific advice, but they are accountable to the public and to their own advisors if they choose not to do so. We need people like David Nutt to assert the independence of scientific advice and to inform the public when government policy departs from that advice."

Tracey Brown, Director, Sense About Science and judge: "John Maddox was a strong and brave communicator and in his years as a trustee of Sense About Science he urged us to be stronger and braver too. The nominations for the John Maddox Prize were humbling. They showed that his values are carried forward in the courage and responsibility that people are taking to communicate sound science and evidence in diverse situations around the world. I am pleased that the prize is being awarded to David Nutt, who has put that responsibility at the centre of everything he does, from international policy meetings to debates in pubs and community clubs."

Lord Rees of Ludlow OM FRS, Cambridge University and judge: "After his high-profile departure from his government-advisory role, David Nutt has been exemplary and energetic in promoting broad and evidence-based discussions of drug-related policy issues."

Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society: "In our complex times, society faces big challenges and there is a need for sound science to guide us, yet too often in practice science is relegated, ignored and even maligned during policy advice. The John Maddox Prize recognises the efforts of scientists to speak out on issues that matter to society, placing evidence into the limelight and battling to keep it there. This year's winner is a bold scientist who will inspire others to keep evidence at the centre of public and policy debates about science."

Sir Mark Walport, Government Chief Scientific Adviser: "A key part of the process of science is communication. For too long there has been a focus solely on effective communication amongst scientists and not enough attention paid to excellent communication by scientists with broader public audiences. The John Maddox prize is important and should serve as an encouragement to scientists to engage in public communication, especially on those difficult issues that are in danger of being hijacked by single issue lobbyists with little respect for scientific evidence or the rigour of science."

Dr Thelma Lovick, Senior Research Fellow in Physiology and Pharmacology, University of Bristol: "In our modern technological society scientists have a duty to explain their work to the layman, particularly when this covers a topic of public interest. David Nutt is a psychiatrist and scientist of international standing whose research work focuses on understanding the malfunctioning of the brain during psychiatric illness. He also works ceaselessly to inform and educate the public, politicians and medical profession alike on the true harm and benefits of legal and illegal psychoactive drugs. David's courage and integrity when speaking out on these matters are to be applauded. His insistence on using sound, unbiased scientific evidence to challenge preconceived ideas about drug use based on moral and political opinions, or social acceptability has engendered considerable political adversity and exposed him to significant personal risk. I am therefore absolutely delighted that his work has been recognized by the award of the John Maddox prize for Standing up for Science."

Sophie Macken, Director at Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs: "I'm delighted that David has won the John Maddox Standing up for Science Prize. He is tireless in his work promoting the role of evidence in reducing drug harms and in the public debate and this award is very much deserved."

Sir Ralph Kohn FRS of the Kohn Foundation: "This is such a well-deserved recognition of John's outstanding scientific work for many years and we are privileged to be associated with this initiative."

Brenda Maddox, Patron of the John Maddox Prize: "My late husband John had an unusual combination of knowledge of science and eloquence of expression. Someone once asked him, 'how much of what you print is wrong?' referring to Nature. John answered immediately, 'all of it. That's what science is about – new knowledge constantly arriving to correct the old.' He led a supreme example of science journalism and others will do well to look up to it."

The Prize pays tribute to the attitude of Sir John who, in the words of his friend **Walter Gratzer:** "wrote prodigiously on all that was new and exciting in scientific discovery and technological advance, denouncing fearlessly what he believed to be wrong, dishonest or shoddy. He did it with humour and grace, but he never sidestepped controversy, which he seemed in fact to relish. His forthrightness brought him some enemies, often in high places, but many more friends. He changed attitudes and perceptions, and strove throughout his long working life for a better public understanding and appreciation of science."

For photos of the winner and interviews and for short films⁵ about the prize and the winner contact Victoria Murphy vmurphy@senseaboutscience.org 020 7490 9590 / 07923 454 964; or Síle Lane on [07719 391 814](tel:07719391814).

Notes for editors:

- 1. The John Maddox Prize for standing up for science**, in its second year, is a joint initiative of science journal Nature, the Kohn Foundation and the charity Sense About Science. This international Prize recognises the work of individuals who promote sound science and evidence on a matter of public interest, facing difficulty or hostility in doing so. In 2013, there were 48 high standard nominations. In 2012, Professor Simon Wessely and Shi-min Fang were the two winners of the inaugural John Maddox Prize for Standing up for Science. The winner received a certificate and £2,000. www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/maddox-prize-2013.html
- 1. The judging panel** consisted of Tracey Brown (Sense About Science), Philip Campbell (Nature), Lord Rees of Ludlow OM FRS and Professor Colin Blakemore.

1. Principles for the Treatment of Independent Scientific Advice:

Professor Nutt's dismissal led to a campaign to set out explicitly the principles underlying independent advice and seek the Government's confirmation of them, to reaffirm all that is good about the independent advisory system, to ensure that new ministers understood what its benefits were and to reduce the likelihood of public cynicism about scientific advice to Government. Sense About Science and the scientific community persuaded the Government to include principles for the treatment of independent advice into the Ministerial Code in 2010. □ www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/independent-scientific-advice.html

1. Sir John Maddox, who this prize commemorates, was a founding trustee at Sense About Science and the inspiration for now established programmes of work including the VoYS (Voice of Young Science) network. This Prize not only recognises Sir John as a passionate and tireless champion and defender of science, but also recognises individuals who stand up for science as Sir John did. As a writer and editor at Nature for 22 years, he changed attitudes and perceptions, engaging with difficult debates and inspiring others to do the same.

Short films about the prize and the winner will be available after embargo at these

links: www.senseaboutscience.org/pages/maddox-prize-2013.html (after 1900

GMT) □ www.youtube.com/user/NatureVideoChannel (after 2330

GMT) □ Or email Victoria Murphy vmurphy@senseaboutscience.org.