

Founding Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project awarded Edinburgh Medal

The 2021 Edinburgh Science Festival awarded the prestigious Edinburgh Medal to anthropologist and author Heidi Larson, the Founding Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, in recognition of the role she has played in recognising the importance of popular and widespread misunderstandings of vaccines and of her work to advance public health and social wellbeing for the benefit of all. The Medal Address is supported by M&G.

It is now revealed that Chair of Global Public Health at the University of Edinburgh and author, Prof. Devi Sridhar will be giving the Oration at this year's Edinburgh Medal Address as part of the 2021 Edinburgh Science Festival. Professor Sridhar's research considers the effectiveness of public health interventions.

Joining her is Professor Linda Bauld, Bruce and John Usher Professor of Public Health, Edinburgh University who will be delivering the Vote of Thanks at the ceremony. Her research

focuses on two main areas: the evaluation of complex public health interventions; and the use of evidence to inform health policy.

Over the last 14 months, both Professors Sridhar and Bauld have become household names as public health experts during the coronavirus pandemic.



L-R: Professors Sridhar, Larson and Bauld

Prof. Larson said: "I am honoured to receive this year's Edinburgh Medal. The Medal reflects not only a recognition of my scientific work, for which I am very grateful, but also an important acknowledgement of the challenging information and trust environment, which needs new approaches as we continually renew the relationship between science and society."

Prof. Sridhar said: "I am delighted to be delivering the Oration at this year's Edinburgh Medal which celebrates the scientific achievements of Prof. Heidi Larson. Her vital research into vaccine hesitancy and how to address it is crucial in helping us win the race to vaccinate the world and end the Covid-19 pandemic."

Prof. Linda Bauld said: "Vaccines save lives. History tells us that this is obvious, but the Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us. Professor Larson has been a champion for the role of social scientists in infectious disease response. Her research has helped us better understand how to build trust and address misinformation as we emerge from the current crisis. We owe her, and the researchers she has mentored, a debt of gratitude for their work on vaccine hesitancy and the social and political factors that affect uptake. I'm delighted to be involved in awarding her the Edinburgh medal. It's a fitting recognition from a City that established the first University department and first chair in public health in the UK."

Amanda Tyndall, Creative and Festival Director at Edinburgh Science Festival said: "Vaccines are a vital part of our response to infectious diseases but global uncertainty and misinformation can hamper efforts to combat the challenges these diseases present. At a time like this the work of Prof. Larson and her Vaccine Confidence Project – approaching the issue with empathy and understanding, not condemnation – has never been more important and we are very proud she is receiving the 2021 Edinburgh Medal."



Edinburgh Science Festival 2021

Edinburgh's Lord Provost Frank Ross said: "The Edinburgh Medal is awarded to men and women of science and technology who have made significant contributions to humanity. This year vaccinations have come to the forefront of all our minds and it is entirely fitting that Prof Heidi Larson is the recipient of this year's medal for her work as Founding Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project which evaluates and addresses vaccine hesitancy. Prof Larson's work is vital in recognising the importance of popular and widespread misunderstandings and providing guidance to engage the public early and pre-empting potential disruptions to roll out of vaccines. Congratulations Heidi."

The 2021 Edinburgh Science Festival takes place between 26 June and 11 July 2021 and is themed around One World: Science Connects Us, exploring how we are all connected – to each other, to Planet Earth and to the wider Universe. As Scotland prepares for COP26 and with programming for the Planet as the Festival's key objective, this year's offer is heavily focused on environment and climate crisis. To browse the full programme, visit sciencefestival.co.uk.