

## **Prof. Heidi Larson, Founding Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project, awarded Edinburgh Medal with Prof. Devi Sridhar giving the Oration and Prof. Linda Bauld, delivering the Vote of Thanks**

- Heidi J. Larson, PhD, Professor of Anthropology, Risk and Decision Science and the Founding Director of the Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine will be presented with the prestigious Edinburgh Medal as part of Edinburgh Science Festival 2021 and give her Medal Address at 7pm on 4 July.
- **Just announced:** Chair of Global Public Health at the University of Edinburgh, Prof. Devi Sridhar will be giving the Oration at the Edinburgh Medal ceremony and Professor Linda Bauld, Bruce and John Usher Professor of Public Health, Edinburgh University will deliver the Vote of Thanks.
- The Edinburgh Medal is an award presented to women and men of science who are judged to have made a significant contribution to the understanding and wellbeing of humanity, previous recipients include Jane Goodall, Sunita Narain and David Attenborough.
- This year's Edinburgh Science Festival moved from its usual Easter slot and takes place from Saturday, 26 June to Sunday, 11 July, exploring the theme of *One World: Science Connects Us*.



L-R: Prof. Sridhar, Prof. Larson and Prof. Bauld

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This year's Edinburgh Science Festival awards 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.

**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'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."

### **About Prof. Larson and the Vaccine Confidence Project**

Heidi J. Larson, PhD, is a Professor of Anthropology, Risk and Decision Science, Clinical Professor of Health Metrics Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle, USA and Guest Professor at the University of Antwerp in Belgium.

Her research focuses on how social and political factors affect the uptake of health interventions and influence policies. Her particular interest lies in risk and rumour management – from clinical trials to delivery – and on building public trust.

Prof. Larson grew up in Massachusetts, USA, and following a degree in Visual and Environmental Studies from Harvard University, she worked with UNICEF and Save the Children around the world; in Israel, Nepal and the South Pacific. In 1998 Prof. Larson joined the WHO as a Senior Adviser in communicable diseases and tuberculosis programmes. She moved back to UNICEF in 2000 to lead UNICEF's strategic communication on new vaccines and to launch [GAVI](#), The Vaccine Alliance, and served on the WHO SAGE Working Group on vaccine hesitancy.

The purpose for the [Vaccine Confidence Project](#) (VCP) which Prof. Larson founded in 2010 is to “monitor public confidence in immunisation programs by listening for early signals of public distrust and questioning and providing risk analysis and guidance to engage the public early and pre-empting potential programme disruptions.” The VCP is the World Health Organisation’s Centre of Excellence on addressing Vaccine Hesitancy.

Read The Lancet’s interview with Prof. Larson in [here](#). You can watch Prof. Larson talking about her debut book, *Stuck: How Vaccine Rumors Start—and Why They Don't Go Away*, [here](#). In the book, Prof. Larson examines how the issues surrounding vaccine hesitancy are, more than anything, about publics alienated from elites, feeling left out of the conversation.

### **About the Edinburgh Medal**

The Edinburgh Medal has been instituted by the City of Edinburgh Council to honour men and women of science and technology who have made a significant contribution to the understanding and wellbeing of humanity.

Each year, since its inception in 1989, the Medallist delivers a Medal Address as part of the annual Edinburgh Science Festival. This year’s Address will take place at 7pm on 4 July in Edinburgh (restrictions permitting) and will be available online.

Previous Medallists include Prof Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, Sir David Attenborough, Prof Jane Goodall, Prof Cordelia Fine, Wangari Mathaii, Prof Colin Blakemore, Christiana Figueres, Sunita Narain and Prof Peter Higgs.

### **About the Edinburgh Science Festival 2021**

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](#).

**/ENDS**

### **Notes to editors:**

More information on Prof. Heidi Larson and her work can be found here:

<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/aboutus/people/larson.heidi>

<https://www.vaccineconfidence.org/about>

**Edinburgh Science**, founded in 1989, is an educational charity that aims to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to discover the world around them. The organisation is best known for organising Edinburgh’s annual Science Festival: the world’s first festival of science and technology and still one of Europe’s largest.

The two-week Festival provides wide and diverse audiences with amazing science-themed experiences through a diverse programme of innovative events for adults and families. Alongside the annual Festival in Edinburgh, the organisation has a strong focus on education, running a touring programme, *Generation Science*, that brings science to life for primary schools around Scotland throughout the year, and running an annual *Careers Hive* event which promotes STEM careers to young people.

After programming on the themes of climate change and the environment for many years, in 2019 Edinburgh Science awarded the Edinburgh Medal to Christiana Figueres, the inspirational Costa Rican diplomat instrumental in the Paris Climate agreement. Inspired by this visit, Edinburgh Science established the Climate Opportunity Ideas Factory, a forum for all sectors to come together and generate collaborative actionable ideas that accelerate our transition to a zero-carbon world.

Edinburgh Science also shares its content and expertise internationally through Edinburgh Science Worldwide and operates a large-scale international programme of work. It regularly presents events overseas and is currently the Major Programming Partner of the annual Abu Dhabi Science Festival, helping to curate, produce and deliver the event. For international partners, the team at Edinburgh Science provide engaging content, curatorial advice on programming and business planning support, along with expert staff and training for local science communicators.

[www.sciencefestival.co.uk](http://www.sciencefestival.co.uk)

For further information, interviews or photos please contact Magda Paduch at The Corner Shop PR: [magda@thecornershoppr.com](mailto:magda@thecornershoppr.com) / 0758 316 4070.