

2009 Science Communication Awards Winners

The 2009 Science Communication Awards were presented to Ceri Harrop, University of Manchester, and Dr Susan Jebb, Medical Research Council Human Nutrition Research, for their passion and dedication to communicating biological science to the public.

The winners accepted their awards and presented examples of their public engagement work at an event held on 16th November. Both winners highlighted two issues: first, scientists have a responsibility to communicate their work to the public; second, science communication work needs to be underpinned by training and evaluation, and needs recognition alongside research and publishing papers.



Ceri accepting her award from Professor Nancy Rothwell, President

Ceri Harrop, winner in the New Researcher category is a postdoctoral research assistant in the University of Manchester's Faculty of Life Sciences. She is developing a 3D *in vitro* model of the human airways to study how asthma and other respiratory diseases can lead to changes in the structure and function of the airways. Ceri has used innovative approaches to explain science, and has built models, written and presented an educational TV program, taken part in radio broadcasts and held workshops, sometimes focusing on scientific themes outside of her own specialist area. Ceri has an infectious enthusiasm for both her research and her communication work: "At school I always wanted to know the what, when and why of things, how things happened, and I chose biology because I wanted to help people.

"It's both highly rewarding and enlightening to take your research to a different audience. It gets you away from the lab bench, and helps you see your work from a different perspective. It was fantastic to be to be nominated and I was amazed and delighted to actually win the award. It's a great honour."

Asked what hurdles she has faced in her communication work, Ceri replied: "We have a duty to communicate with the public since we're using public money. But it's not recognised as an achievement [in the same way] as if I publish a paper or present at a conference. "

Ceri was nominated by Professor Martin Humphries, representing the Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell-Matrix Research.





Susan Jebb, winner in the Established Researcher category, is head of nutrition and health research at the Medical Research Council Collaborative Centre for Human Nutrition Research (HNR). Her research focuses on the role of the diet in the causes and treatment of obesity and its related metabolic diseases. She also leads the HNR Communications team. Susan has carried out extensive communication activities about obesity in society with a variety of audiences, and her work has had significant impact and reach – especially with policy makers. She has used a range of methods to share knowledge of her science, including articles, public lectures, playing a key role in government advisory committees, and giving cookery demonstrations.

Susan said: “It is an honour to receive this award. Translating scientific advances into tangible improvements in the health and wealth of the nation hinges on excellence in science linked to effective communication and dissemination skills and strategies. The rewards of working with policy makers should not be underestimated as the need for policy informed by robust scientific evidence is now more important than ever. I am delighted that my contribution to science communication has been recognised in this way.”

Susan echoed Ceri’s sentiments about the poor recognition that science communication work currently receives, despite its importance. Susan writes nine articles a year for a health magazine with a circulation of 100,000, and commented wryly: “I’m convinced that my impact factor in my [magazine] articles is a great deal higher than my impact factor in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*”.

Susan added, “Science communication needs to be underpinned by training and evaluation. We need to develop centres of excellence that show what can be achieved. We also must develop solid measures of evaluation. ”



Susan was nominated by Dr Ann Prentice, representing the Nutrition Society.

Sponsors

The Awards were sponsored by Pfizer, whose European Research and Development headquarters are based in Sandwich, Kent.

