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RT HON ALAN JOHNSON MP
HOME SECRETARY
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5th November, 2009

Dear Mr. Johnson,

The British Neuroscience Association and the British Association for Psychopharmacology are concerned about the implications of the recent furore surrounding the sacking of Professor David Nutt for the value that Government apparently places on scientific research and expert opinion in this area. We are also concerned about the confusing signal it provides to us as scientists about the importance of public engagement and the communication of scientific findings.

Drug use and abuse is a massive social problem, destroying lives and costing the UK tens of billions of pounds each year. Neuroscientists, pharmacologists, psychiatrists and those in related fields are collaborating in a worldwide effort to understand drug addiction and find ways to prevent and treat it. Recent findings have transformed our understanding of addiction and this understanding should surely be transmitted to the Government as it makes important decisions about this problem area.

The public needs strong and clear guidance on the dangers of drugs, not only to inform their personal decisions but in order that new policies can be formulated in schools and the workplace. Although such policies are of a sensitive nature they must at least be informed by scientific evidence.

That the Government appears to have so forcefully rejected the expert scientific advice provided by Professor Nutt and his colleagues only serves to create confusion. Scientists are urged to 'engage' with the public, yet Professor Nutt's opinions are being stifled by political sensitivities.



The British Neuroscience Association and the British Association for Psychopharmacology believe that such a stance does not bode well for the future for truly independent advice on social issues with a scientific foundation. Are science advisory panels destined only to be a mouthpiece for the Government? If so, experts will surely refuse to participate and the credibility of science - in this case neuroscience and psychopharmacology - will be severely undermined.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor Trevor Robbins, FRS, FMedSci
President, British Neuroscience Association

Professor Gavin Reynolds
President, British Association for Psychopharmacology

(cc : Professor Beddington, Lord Drayson and the Rt Hon Gordon Brown, MP)