



Science Communication Prize 2021 – Gust Bouwen

Laureates:

Prof. Herman Goossens

Prof. Niel Hens

Prof. Pierre Van Damme

Prof. Erika Vlieghe

Nominator:

Vice-Rector Filip Lardon

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic is throwing our whole society into disarray today. We seem to have stepped into a scenario from an incredible science fiction series. The country promptly turns upside-down. All ministers and health experts responsible are immediately put on high alert. Draconian measures are taken, including a complete nationwide and even global lockdown. Schools are closed, flights are cancelled, borders are closed and human contact is reduced to the bare minimum, with the necessary protective measures such as wearing masks and putting up Plexiglas partitions. *Never seen before.*

But then, luckily, science steps in. At an unprecedented rate, research is being conducted, scientific discoveries are made, and vaccines are being developed that will help us to get out of this misery. Science literally saves mankind in its time of need.

In the midst of this pandemic, respect and, at the same time, discontent are emerging in response to the measures proposed by scientists and implemented by policy makers. Science is respected and criticised at the same time. It will be difficult to inform the public about new and evolving insights and about the measures that are recommended or imposed as a result.

In this turbulent period, the scientists involved from the University of Antwerp are being highlighted in a well-considered and respectable way. Our colleagues Herman Goossens, Niel Hens, Pierre Van Damme and Erika Vlieghe, as well as all the colleagues who support them in their laboratories and services, participate in a special way in scientific research and in the societal debate. They help us to get out of this impasse. They do so with great drive, accuracy and without unnecessarily polarising social opinions, and they honourably elevate the University of Antwerp in the field of science communication. Through their deliberate communications with any journalistic medium, they give credibility to our university in particular and to academic research in general. And this frequent appearance in the press and in public opinion is done on top of their daily activities and overflowing schedules. That deserves gratitude and great respect.

For the above reasons, I would like to ask Rector Herman Van Goethem to honour colleagues Herman Goossens, Niel Hens, Pierre Van Damme and Erika Vlieghe with the Science Communication Prize 2021 – Gust Bouwen of the University of Antwerp.