# Royal Society faces backlash over Elon Musk's membership amid misinformation concerns



The Royal Society, a venerable institution that has long been a bastion of scientific excellence since its inception in 1660, recently found itself embroiled in controversy over the conduct of one of its members, Elon Musk. The technology mogul, celebrated for his roles at SpaceX and Tesla, has drawn severe criticism from within the scientific community for his reckless dissemination of misinformation, particularly surrounding Covid-19 and vaccines. In the wake of his election as a fellow in 2018, calls for revocation of his membership from concerned scientists have only intensified.

This urgent dialogue was catalyzed by an open letter signed by over 3,400 researchers, including numerous Nobel laureates, who expressed alarm that Musk's behaviour fundamentally undermines the Society’s code of conduct, which emphasizes respect for evidence and the responsible communication of factual information. Renowned figures, such as Geoffrey Hinton, a Royal Society fellow and Nobel Prize winner dubbed the “Godfather of AI,” declared that Musk is inflicting significant harm on the integrity of scientific institutions. Hinton demanded Musk's expulsion, condemning him not merely for his conspiratorial tendencies or offensive gestures, but for the extensive damage his actions are inflicting on scientific credibility in the US.

The Royal Society convened on a Monday evening to confront these pressing concerns, centering discussions on the standard of conduct expected from its fellows during public engagements. The Society's code explicitly mandates that fellows protect its reputation, regardless of context. Reports suggest that Musk's activities on his social media platform, X, which he acquired in 2022, have been particularly instrumental in fuelling the epidemic of misinformation that is currently eroding public trust in science.

Musk’s reaction to the growing backlash has been dismissive, belittling the importance of prestigious awards and memberships by asserting that “only craven, insecure fools care about awards and memberships.” He has derided Hinton's criticisms as “carelessly ignorant, cruel and false,” while challenging detractors to pinpoint specific instances of wrongdoing. This reaction starkly highlights the chasm between Musk and a swath of the scientific community who view his utterances as a direct affront to their principles.

Remarkably, Stephen Curry, a structural biology professor and the letter's originator, stressed that their concerns are rooted not in enforcing some political orthodoxy, but in a staunch commitment to scientific values. His critique posed a difficult question about how Musk's prolific spread of misinformation aligns with the core tenets of the Royal Society.

Despite the attendance of over 150 fellows at the meeting, discussions concluded without a clear declaration on Musk's fellowship status. In a statement afterwards, the Royal Society reiterated its commitment to safeguarding science amid escalating adversities threatening the scientific community, especially in contexts where funding and support are persistently diminishing.

The ambiguity surrounding the Royal Society's potential courses of action leaves many in the scientific sector apprehensive about the institution’s resolve to confront disinformation. Curry's incisive remarks forcefully questioned whether the Society is truly prepared to uphold its code of conduct, hinting at a potential lack of conviction in combating the misinformation epidemic.

As it stands, Musk retains his fellowship, with no forthcoming changes on the horizon, leaving many scientists contemplating the troubling implications of the Royal Society’s tepid response to a fellow whose actions increasingly seem at odds with its foundational ideals. In an era where accountability is paramount, one must ask: is the Royal Society ready to stand firm against the tide of misinformation that threatens to engulf the scientific landscape?

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://freespeechunion.org/elon-musk-and-the-royal-society-the-campaign-to-expel-a-fellow/> - This article discusses the controversy surrounding Elon Musk's membership in the Royal Society, including the campaign to expel him due to his dissemination of misinformation and his actions being seen as inconsistent with the Society's values.
* <https://www.royalsociety.org/> - The official website of the Royal Society provides background information on its history, mission, and code of conduct, which are central to the controversy surrounding Elon Musk's membership.
* <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/people/s.curry> - This link provides information about Professor Stephen Curry, who is mentioned as a key figure in the campaign against Elon Musk's membership in the Royal Society.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-62234124> - This BBC article might discuss the broader context of scientific institutions dealing with misinformation and the challenges faced by organizations like the Royal Society in maintaining their integrity.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/feb/14/elon-musk-royal-society-membership-under-threat> - This article from The Guardian could provide additional details on the controversy surrounding Elon Musk's membership and the reactions from the scientific community.
* <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00251-4> - Nature, a leading scientific publication, might have articles discussing the impact of misinformation on scientific credibility and the role of institutions like the Royal Society in addressing these issues.