

## Science Policy Newsletter – a weekly round-up of policy headlines and stories

26 February 2021

This newsletter provides links to published news articles from a range of sources. Views or opinions presented are those of the original author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Royal Society of Biology.

### News

#### Top stories

##### [World's first coronavirus Human Challenge study receives ethics approval in the UK](#)

The Government has stated that up to 90 volunteers aged 18 - 30 years will be exposed to COVID-19 in a safe and controlled environment to increase understanding of how the virus affects people.

##### [UK Government to launch new research agency to support high risk, high reward science](#)

The Advanced Research & Invention Agency (ARIA) will be led by scientists who will have the freedom to identify and fund transformational science and technology at speed.

*The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee published its [report](#) on the new agency earlier in February 2021. Among other [RSB Consultation responses](#), you can read the RSB response to the Committee's inquiry [here](#).*

#### Royal Society of Biology news

##### [COVID-19 Bulletin](#)

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB produces a monthly bulletin collating some of the bioscience behind the outbreak and response. The latest edition, published on the 18th of January 2021, includes epidemiological updates and assessment of public health strategies; updates on testing, on new drugs, and on vaccine development, roll-out and communications; looking back on how science rose to the challenge through 2020 and into 2021; and a discussion on ways you can look after yourself and others in 2021. See [our webpages](#) to read previous editions and subscribe to the next.

#### Health and biomedicine

##### [Opinion: 'We're backing the AMR Action Fund – this is what it means for antibiotic innovation'](#)

An opinion piece by Tim Jinks, Head of Drug-resistant Infections Programme at Wellcome, describing the importance of a new collaboration of private and philanthropic partners in the search for new antibiotics to treat drug-resistant infections.

##### [Child heart transplants: Record year for new-style operations](#)

Two UK hospitals have teamed up to offer a novel type of heart-transplant service for children, reducing waiting times for the life-saving operations, reports BBC News.

### [Mindfulness, laughter and robot dogs may relieve lockdown loneliness – study](#)

University of Cambridge researchers identify potentially effective interventions to help people cope with loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, reports The Guardian.

## Food and drink

### [Deadly salmonella outbreak in UK linked to chicken products](#)

The Guardian covers the ongoing salmonella outbreak in the UK, where at least one person has died, and more than 200 children have been poisoned.

### [Food anaphylaxis in the UK - what we've learnt by analysing national data](#)

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) reports on a project that has set out to better understand national data on anaphylaxis and explore how the improved use of data could support the FSA in its work on food allergy.

## Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

### [Increased support for fishing and shellfish businesses](#)

The Government has announced enhanced financial support for the seafood industry with cash grants for seafood and aquaculture businesses across the UK.

### [Agri and food production causing huge biodiversity loss](#)

A study produced by UK think-tank Chatham House and backed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Compassion in World Farming describes how major reform of global food systems is urgently needed to address natural habitat loss, reports Poultry World.

### [NFU Live: Batters stresses need for investment in UK farming](#)

Investment in farming would have massive benefits to the whole country – not just food production, Mrs Batters, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU), told the NFU's annual conference on Tuesday (23 February).

### [Biodiversity of Grasslands Webinar Review](#)

The British Society of Animal Science review their Biodiversity of Grasslands Webinar series and talk about how a greater impact is likely to be achieved by involving interested farmers in research design and target setting for policy.

## Environment and ecology

### [Can we capture the moment?](#)

Can we capture the moment and change our relationship with nature and wealth? The Dasgupta Review on the economics of biodiversity calls for change in how we value nature and measure economics success. Minna Hartikainen, Project Officer for the Natural Capital Initiative (NCI), discusses what it takes to turn transformative economic thinking into meaningful political and financial action ahead of the Spring Budget 2021.

### [Opinion: 'At 50, the UN Environment Programme must lead again'](#)

An opinion piece for Nature's world view looks at how the agency could rediscover its capacity for connecting organisations to protect the planet's health.

### [We need a green recovery after COVID-19, but banning wildlife trade could do more harm than good](#)

Writing for The Conversation, Hollie Booth, PhD Candidate, Conservation Science, University of Oxford, shares results of a study that indicates large-scale prohibitions on wildlife use could have negative consequences for nature and human health.

## Climate and energy

### [Say Hy to the home of the future](#)

The UK Government has announced that the first homes with household appliances fuelled entirely by hydrogen are to be built in Gateshead, funded in part by the Government's Hy4Heat innovation programme.

### [Prince of Wales warns 'no time to waste' to address global climate and health crises](#)

His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, gave a warning in a pre-recorded speech to open the Commonwealth Science Conference and called for collaboration between science and industry to rapidly develop both nature and technology-based solutions.

### [Hairy 'super plant' absorbs 20% more pollution on busy roads, RHS experts say](#)

A one-metre length of cotoneaster hedge absorbs the same amount of pollution in a week that a car emits on a 500-mile drive, reports Sky News.

### [The Auto Industry Bets Its Future on Batteries](#)

The New York Times reports carmakers, government agencies and investors are pouring money into battery research in a global race to profit from emission-free electric cars.

## Waste

### [Chemistry can help make plastics sustainable — but it isn't the whole solution](#)

A Nature Editorial looks at a new technique that could help make plastics easier to recycle but suggests that Government regulation is also needed to tackle plastic pollution.

### [Soil safely filters 38 million tonnes of human waste each year](#)

Researchers at Cranfield University analysed how much human waste is produced and where it ends up by reviewing existing data from interviews, observations and direct field measurements from 48 cities in Africa, Asia, North America and South America, reports New Scientist.

## Animal research

### [Foot and mouth 20 years on: what an animal virus epidemic taught UK science](#)

The Guardian covers the experience of Dr Christine Middlemiss, UK's Chief Veterinary Officer, during the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001.

### [Mink farms a continuing Covid risk to humans and wildlife, warn EU experts](#)

The Guardian reports on how health experts call for regular testing of staff and animals after coronavirus is found at 400 breeding units across Europe.

## Government and Parliament

### [Better regulation needed to protect environment and boost economy, says Environment Agency Chief Executive](#)

Sir James Bevan calls for better regulation to protect the environment as a new report highlights the importance of environmental regulation in England.

## Research funding and higher education policy

### [Opinion: Providing maintenance loans to sub-degree students would cost peanuts – but make a real difference](#)

In this opinion piece for Wonkhe, Professor Dave Phoenix, Vice Chancellor of London South Bank University, calls for the Government to deliver on the promise of the Skills for Jobs white paper and extend student maintenance loans to students taking qualifications at levels four and five.

### [Support for doctoral research students must go to those who need it most](#)

UK Research and Innovation's Chief Executive Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser writes an open letter on UKRI's support for doctoral students.

## Schools education policy

### [Women doing more home schooling during Covid lockdown than men](#)

The Guardian covers figures released by the Office for National Statistics, which suggests women were significantly more likely than men to supervise home schooling for their children in this lockdown compared with the one last April, which has a worsening impact on mothers' wellbeing.

### [Opinion: England's education recovery plan should focus on wellbeing, not on 'catching up'](#)

A piece in The Conversation, written by Helena Gillespie, Professor of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and Academic Director of Inclusive Education, University of East Anglia, has called for children to be at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery plan.

## Diversity and inclusion

### [Inclusivity in innovation: looking towards the next normal](#)

Dr Emily Nott, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programmes at Innovate UK, discusses equality, diversity and inclusion in business innovation.

## Ethics

### [AI needs regulation and connectivity to tackle poverty](#)

An editorial for SciDev.Net suggests that AI offers huge potential for health, agriculture and urban development, but fears remain over privacy, bias and jobs, especially in poorer countries.

## Digital technologies

### ['Was there life on mars?' UK scientists play key part in NASA mission to Red Planet](#)

The UK Space Agency reports that researchers at Imperial College London and the Natural History Museum will help to decide which samples are sent to Earth in a search for evidence of ancient microbial life on Mars.

### [Shape-shifting, self-healing, autonomous materials could help build sustainable future, says Royal Society report](#)

According to a report by the Royal Society, biologically inspired materials, able to grow and adapt to their environment, could extend the lifespan of electronic devices, medical implants and infrastructure, and unlock an array of environmental benefits.

## International news

### [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Situation Dashboard](#)

The World Health Organisation summarises the reported number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths.

### [Israel pollution: Tar globs disfigure coast after oil spill](#)

BBC News covers the oil spill off the coast of Israel, in what officials are calling one of the worst environmental disasters to hit the country.

### [Ferret becomes first North American endangered species to be cloned](#)

Announced by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US scientists have successfully cloned a highly-endangered black-footed ferret using DNA from an identical animal that has been frozen since 1988, BBC News reports.

### [Dying for a delicacy](#)

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) covers a survey, which revealed conservation loopholes are causing a catastrophic decline in wild Chinese giant salamander populations.

## Opportunities

### **RSB Gopher Science Lab free online training for primary teachers**

The Royal Society of Biology is offering 40 state-funded primary schools in the UK the opportunity for four teachers to have free access to RSB's Gopher Science Lab [online training course](#). With thanks to generous support from [The Worshipful Company of Horners](#) enabling RSB to offer this opportunity. Primary school teachers working in UK based, state-funded, primary schools can email [Amanda Hardy](#) to apply on behalf of their school to access the paid-for online training places on a first come first served basis.

### **RSB's Science at Home festival resources online**

RSB and some of our science friends have worked together to run our first ever virtual science festival - [RSB's Science at Home](#) - with activities and resources available online, so you can now take part in the festival any time that suits you. With a range of videos, activities, games and more straight to your computer screen to entertain and engage you and your family. Take part today and tell your friends via [#RSBScienceAtHome](#).

### **Credibility in Neuroscience prize**

Do you feel credible, robust, reproducible research isn't valued or celebrated highly enough? Or perhaps you're a neuroscience researcher working to make your own work as open and credible as possible? If that sounds like you, then check out the Credibility Prize recently launched by the British Neuroscience Association. Nominations for their three categories are open to students, individual researchers or teams working in neuroscience research.

**Closes: 28 February 2021**

### **National Survey of Technical Staff**

MI TALENT is a Research England funded programme to advance status and opportunity for technical staff in research and higher education within the UK. The TALENT team have put together this national survey of technical staff, hosted by Shift Learning, and are seeking your views as a member of the UK technical community. Your feedback will provide insights to be incorporated within upcoming reports and policy recommendations for the sector.

**Closes: 28 February 2021**

### **International 3Rs prize**

Have you published a paper that describes outstanding and original work that has or could have major impacts on the replacement, reduction or refinement of the use of animals in research? If so, then you should apply for the annual NC3Rs prize which is sponsored by GSK to recognise a paper published in the last three years with demonstrable 3Rs impacts.

**Closes: 03 March 2021**

## Consultations

### **Defra consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is consulting on the regulation of gene edited (GE) organisms and gathering views on the wider regulatory framework governing genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact [consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk) for more information and if you would like to contribute.

**Closes: 17 March 2021**

### **Bovine tuberculosis: proposals to help eradicate disease in England**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is seeking views on their proposals to help eradicate bovine tuberculosis in England.

**Closes: 24 March 2021**

### **Bovine tuberculosis: future measures to help accelerate disease eradication**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is seeking views on future possible measures to accelerate disease eradication in England.

**Closes: 24 March 2021**

## [RSB Policy Resource Library online](#)

The RSB has created a searchable, digital library of more than 800 statements, responses, briefings and other policy resources produced by the RSB and our Member Organisations across the biosciences. This collection is freely and openly accessible to everyone, including members and non-members, through the [mySociety portal](#) (no registration necessary).

## Events

### [Voice of the Future 2021](#)

**10 March 2021**

Young scientists and engineers will question MPs and Ministers about the issues that matter to them, online, at Voice of the Future 2021.

### [The Effect of the Coronavirus Lockdown on the Mental Health of Children and Young People](#)

**24 March 2021**

**18:00 – 19:00 GMT**

An online event from the Foundation for Science and Technology. In this seminar, speakers will explore some of the evidence from recent studies, and consider what the policy implications might be in the short and medium term.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all RSB events will continue to take place online and updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

## And finally...

### [Cats don't avoid strangers who behave badly towards their owners, unlike dogs](#)

Writing for The Conversation, Ali Boyle, Research Fellow in Kinds of Intelligence (Philosophy), University of Cambridge, reports on a Japanese study, which complicates the picture of our relationship with cats.

### [The Biologist](#)

The theme of the first quarterly issue of *The Biologist* is 'listening in': We look at [eavesdropping animals](#), the [best biology podcasts](#), and how bacteria can [signal the presence of antibiotic to help others](#). Plus, we look at how [new international targets on biodiversity and climate change, being negotiated at COP15 and COP26 later this year, can work better together](#); hear from the [scientists who discovered living cells in 100 million year old sediment](#), and discuss how the [press has covered the science of the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

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