

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

13 May 2022

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

Health and biomedicine

[**New method delivers life-saving drugs to the brain — using sound waves**](#)

An emerging technique harnessing ultrasound may revolutionise the treatment of fatal or hard-to-cure conditions, from cancer to Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, reports National Geographic.

[**Opinion: Measles: global increase in cases likely driven by COVID pandemic**](#)

Writing for the Conversation, Conor Meehan, senior lecturer in microbiology, Nottingham Trent University, examines a report by the World Health Organization and Unicef that warns there could be a significant increase in the number of measles cases around the world.

[**Computational scientists boost skin's natural defences**](#)

According to UK Research and Innovation, computational scientists have found that vitamin B3 could be used to boost the skin's natural defences, based on a recent study.

Food and drink

[**Small decrease in food prices in April 'a welcome relief'**](#)

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has stated that after reaching an all-time high in March amid repercussions from the war in Ukraine, world food prices decreased last month.

[**Fruits and vegetables are less nutritious than they used to be**](#)

Mounting evidence shows that many of today's whole foods aren't as packed with vitamins and nutrients as they were 70 years ago, potentially putting people's health at risk, reports National Geographic.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

[**Scientists turn on gene without creating a GMO**](#)

According to Rothamsted Research, scientists have found a way to switch on a dormant gene without inserting foreign DNA and creating a GMO, as would usually be the approach.

[**Taking pray out of spray and Spotify for blossoms**](#)

Horizon covers how digital solutions can help citrus farmers reduce the use of pesticides, or aid customers in choosing cut flowers that are produced with a lower carbon footprint. Each of these projects were supported by the European Innovation Council (EIC).

The developing UK seaweed industry

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science explores the resurgence of interest in seaweed, driven by the many uses of seaweed, its high nutritional value, and its ability to provide ecosystem services.

Environment and ecology

UK's flying insects have declined by 60% in 20 years

The UK's insect population has fallen sharply as the invertebrates are affected by rising temperatures and fragmented habitats, reports the Natural History Museum.

Lowly mushrooms may be key to ecosystem survival in a warming world

Fungi that decompose plant matter may keep ecosystems healthy, especially after drought, writes AAAS Science.

Collision hotspots for migrating birds revealed in new study

The British Ecological Society covers how new research led by the University of East Anglia highlights the areas in Europe and North Africa where the construction of wind turbines or power lines is likely to increase the risk of death for migrating birds.

Climate and energy

Climate: World getting 'measurably closer' to 1.5-degree threshold

The United Nations News covers a new report by the World Meteorological Organization which says there is a 50:50 chance of average global temperature reaching 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels in the next five years, and the likelihood is increasing with time.

Net zero challenge areas for energy network innovation funding

Innovate UK and Ofgem have set the challenge areas for the next round of the Strategic Innovation Fund to help energy networks accelerate the transition to net zero, reports UK Research and Innovation.

Extreme weather: What is it and how is it connected to climate change?

Heatwaves, deadly floods and wildfires all mean people are experiencing the link between extreme weather and climate change, writes BBC News.

Waste

Lincolnshire: South Kesteven green gas project runs on food waste

Hundreds of tonnes of food waste in Lincolnshire has been used to produce biogas instead of being sent to landfill as part of a trial scheme, reports BBC News.

Research funding and higher education policy

REF 2021: Social sciences on the up as arts and humanities shrink

Times Higher Education covers how main panel C records the biggest increase in the number of submissions and participating staff.

Understanding the REF 2021 results

David Kernohan, acting editor of Wonkhe, unpacks what the REF results mean and brings out key points of interest from the mass of data.

Opinion: We need to talk about REF and early career researchers

Sunday Blake, associate editor at Wonkhe, warns that academia needs to have vital conversations about the impact of the Research Excellence Framework on disadvantaged researchers.

UK Engineering Biology receives £20.6 million funding boost

UK Research and Innovation and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory have invested £20.6 million into innovative projects across the UK.

UK student mental health crisis ‘may be worse than thought’

A study highlights significant under-reporting of anxiety and stress, with male and ethnic minority learners among those least likely to seek help, reports Times Higher Education.

Schools education policy

Opinion: Teaching children about climate change and sustainability

More effective and engaging climate education can help prepare them to play their part in combatting climate change, says Maria Rossini, head of education, British Science Association (BSA), in this BSA blog.

PM to announce new laws to level up education opportunity so no child is left behind

The Government has stated that the Schools Bill aims to help deliver the Government's ambition to give every child in the country a world-class education, providing the foundation they need to secure future well-paid jobs.

Open access and publication policy

Opinion: The New STM Integrity Hub

In this Scholarly Kitchen post, Joris van Rossum, product director, STM Integrity Hub, and Hylke Koers, chief information officer, STM Solutions, were interviewed to learn more about the project, its goals, and how it might develop.

Diversity and inclusion

Why deaf inclusion matters

To mark Deaf Awareness Week, 2nd - 8th May this year, the British Science Association explored the issue of the underrepresentation of deaf students in STEM higher education, and how the barriers creating a lack of equality and inclusion can be broken.

The blind farmer: ‘It’s all I ever wanted to do. Now I can help others do it’

Mike Duxbury never let the loss of his sight hold him back. The Guardian covers how he has set up a farm to train others with disabilities for a life in agriculture.

Mental Health Awareness Week 2022: Loneliness

This House of Commons Library Insight looks at how loneliness affects our mental health, what the Government has done to address the issue and future policy commitments.

International news

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Situation Dashboard

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

How this golden-eyed feline became the biggest comeback in cat conservation

An all-out effort to breed the Iberian lynx in captivity has allowed the animals to rebound throughout their native Spain and Portugal, according to National Geographic.

Land restoration urgent as degradation hits poorest – UN

SciDev.Net covers a landmark UN report that is urging immediate investment in large-scale land restoration to mitigate the harms caused by degradation affecting half the world's population.

China expands control over genetic data used in scientific research

Guidelines released this year are the latest regulations to protect China's genetic resources, but some scientists say they are making collaborations harder, reports Nature News.

Other

What is synthetic data, and how can it advance research and development?

Writing for the Royal Society, Alison Noble, technikos professor of biomedical engineering, University of Oxford, covers a new survey which is the first to comprehensively set out how synthetic data is enabling the use of data, without sharing data.

People

UK Committee on Research Integrity panel members announced

Following the conclusion of a highly competitive recruitment round, eight members have been appointed to the new UK Committee on Research Integrity, reports UK Research and Innovation.

Nasa climate research scientist awarded World Food prize

The Guardian covers how Cynthia Rosenzweig wins a prize in recognition of her modelling of the climate crisis' impact on food production.

Opportunities

John Maddox Prize 2022

As a joint initiative from Sense about Science and the international scientific journal Nature, the prize recognises researchers who have shown great courage and integrity in standing up for science and scientific reasoning, and advancing public discussion of difficult topics, despite fierce opposition and hostility.

Closes: 16 May 2022

WCP2023 ECR Design Competition extended

The ECR Pharmacology Logo Design Competition is your chance to have your design featured on promotional materials for WCP2023, which will help raise funds to support the participation of early career researchers at the Congress. There is also a £100 (pounds sterling) Amazon Gift Card up for grabs for the overall winner, and a £25 (pounds sterling) Amazon Gift Card for one runner up.

Closes: 27 May 2022

Researchers at Risk Fellowships

The British Academy with Cara (the Council for At-Risk Academics) is establishing a Researchers at Risk Fellowships Programme with the support of the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society. The Fellowships will cover the natural sciences, medical sciences, engineering, humanities and social sciences with applications made via UK-based institutions.

Closes: 1 June 2022

Call for RSB members and Fellows to deliver training courses

The RSB is currently looking to expand its training provision in a variety of areas, but in particular covering topics of sustainability, biodiversity and ecology. Courses can range from an introduction to a particular topic all the way through to more advanced material for those with pre-existing knowledge/experience. If you feel you have the relevant knowledge and experience to deliver training in a given area we would love to hear from you. [Click here](#) to see a full list of desired programme topics and to download an application form . Please submit any questions, or your completed form by email to training@rsb.org.uk

Closes: 4 June 2022

Apprentice of the Year Award

The award celebrates apprentices and recognises their contribution to their teams and the wider bioscience community. The award forms part of the RSB's wider work supporting technical staff, through our support of the Technician Commitment.

Closes: 20 June 2022

RSB Photography Competition 2022

'Communication' is the theme of this year's Royal Society of Biology Photography Competition. Life on Earth is constantly communicating and this year we invite you to capture these interactions. The competition has two age categories each with a cash prize: 18 and over (£1000) and under 18s (£500).

Closes: 24 June 2022

RSB Outreach and Engagement Award 2022

Are you a bioscience researcher involved in science communication? If you work in any sector of UK biosciences, apply for the Royal Society of Biology Outreach and Engagement Award 2022 and win up to £1500.

Closes: 1 July 2022

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2022

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2022 specimen drawing competition for 7 – 18 year olds is now open for submissions. Prizes include art materials for students and their school can also win £100. Visit the Royal Society of Biology [website](#) for more information.

Closes: 29 July 2022

Consultations

Vitamin D

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) is seeking views on how to improve the vitamin D status of the population in England.

Closes: 15 May 2022

New Deal for Postgraduate Research

The New Deal for Postgraduate Research is a long-term piece of work that aims to improve the experience and quality of postgraduate research training in the UK. In this engagement exercise, UK Research and Innovation is focusing primarily on doctoral training (for example, working towards a PhD), but also welcomes comments on other research-focused training and qualifications.

Closes: 17 May 2022

Consultation on environmental targets

Defra is seeking views on the first suite of Environment Act 2021 targets.

Closes: 27 June 2022

Mental health and wellbeing plan

The Department of Health and Social Care is seeking views on what we can do to improve everyone's mental health and wellbeing.

Closes: 7 July 2022

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

[Parliamentary Links Day 2022](#)

28 June 2022

09:00 – 12:30 BST

Houses of Parliament, London

Parliamentary Links Day is the largest science event on the annual Parliamentary events calendar. It is organised by the Royal Society of Biology on behalf of the science and engineering community to strengthen dialogue with Parliament, and to provide MPs with a more rounded understanding of the scientific issues we face. The theme for this year's event is Science and International Collaboration.

[The 6th Black Minority and Ethnic Early Career Researcher Hybrid conference](#)

7 July 2022

08:30 – 18:00 BST

University of West London, Ealing, London

This event is free to attend, and both online and in-person admission is available. By attending the conference, you will have the opportunity to hear how Black and Minority Ethnic academics have navigated their journey, network, get a mentor and empower yourself through the workshops. The Royal Society of Biology is supporting this event.

And finally...

[Whale faces reveal how the world's biggest animals evolved](#)

Whales are some of the most extreme mammals alive on the planet, but how they evolved from furry, four-legged critters to giants of the ocean has not been fully understood, writes the Natural History Museum.

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