

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

20 November 2018

### News

#### Top stories

##### [\*\*Brexit: what the draft deal means for science\*\*](#)

If approved, divorce agreement will see the United Kingdom leave the European nuclear-regulation body — but many uncertainties remain for research.

#### Health and biomedicine

##### [\*\*Government promises more funding to fight superbugs\*\*](#)

The government has agreed an extra £10 million to fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR) at home and abroad.

##### [\*\*No freedom of choice in vaccination, top EU health official insists\*\*](#)

There is no freedom of choice when it comes to vaccination because it involves putting other people's health at risk, a top EU health official has warned, adding that ongoing debate in Italy about inoculations is verging "on the absurd".

##### [\*\*How Facebook and Twitter could be the next disruptive force in clinical trials\*\*](#)

Participants in medical research are more empowered than ever to influence the design and outcomes of experiments. Now, researchers are trying to keep up.

##### [\*\*Lab-grown 'mini brains' produce electrical patterns that resemble those of premature babies\*\*](#)

Structures could help researchers to study the early stages of brain development disorders, including epilepsy.

#### Food and drink

##### [\*\*Overwhelming public support for sugar and calorie reduction\*\*](#)

A survey from Public Health England (PHE) found that around 9 in 10 people support the government working with the food industry to make food healthier.

## Agriculture and fishery

### Regulatory measures to tackle agricultural pollution to be introduced

Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, has today confirmed regulations covering the whole of Wales to protect water quality from agricultural pollution will be introduced next spring.

### £5.1 million UKRI funding for UK aquaculture research and innovation

Vaccines made using algae are being developed to keep fish free from disease and help protect the UK's aquaculture industry.

## Environment and ecology

### Young people join together for Year of Green Action

Lord Gardiner meets with young environment advocates as part of the #iwill campaign.

### Project to help protect coastal defences and the environment

Environment Agency teams have been working to restore eroding saltmarsh in north Essex to help preserve coastal defences and enhance the ecology.

### Ambitious UK-US Antarctic research mission begins

A team of UK and US polar scientists are about to embark on one of the largest joint Antarctic missions for more than 70 years. It's the first field season of a five-year quest to understand the contribution that the Thwaites Glacier in West Antarctica will make to global sea level.

### Helping fish and eels along their journey

A specially designed fish pass could be rolled out across Essex to allow fish to travel more easily through rivers.

### Protecting biodiversity in palm oil

News that chocolate, bread and dried fruit all share a common ingredient with household detergents and cosmetics might sound both unlikely and unappetising.

### 'Conservation successes' bring hope for mountain gorilla

### How green is your street?

Have you ever wondered how green your street is compared with your neighbourhood, or your city? The Data Science Campus at Office for National Statistics is experimenting with a new way of analysing how green cities are.

## Water and air

### Health Matters: Air pollution – sources, impacts and actions

## Climate and energy

### Tree planting in UK 'must double to tackle climate change'

Government advisers call for radical changes, including turning farmland into forests

## [Dozens arrested after climate protest blocks five London bridges](#)

Thousands of protesters occupied bridges across the Thames over extinction crisis in huge act of peaceful civil disobedience

## [Climate change: Worries over CO2 emissions from intensifying wildfires](#)

### [Policies of China, Russia and Canada threaten 5C climate change, study finds](#)

Ranking of countries' goals shows even EU on course for more than double safe level of warming.

## **Waste**

### [Lords debates plastic threat to the environment](#)

Members of the Lords, including a trustee of the Waste and Resources Action Programme and a board member of environmental law organisation ClientEarth, will debate the threat of plastic to the environment and the case for improved recycling. The debate was planned for 15 November but was postponed. A new date for the debate has yet to be scheduled.

### [The Puzzle of Plastics: Is there a solution to single-use?](#)

Professor Richard Thompson, Head of the International Marine Litter Research Unit at the University of Plymouth, discusses the major environmental challenges that plastics present and some possible policy solutions.

### [UK marine scientists begin work to deliver marine litter action in South Pacific](#)

Work on the Commonwealth Litter Programme has commenced in the South Pacific. Cefas scientists are working with local partners to take action on marine litter.

### [Independent review calls for action to tackle serious and organised waste crime](#)

An independent review into serious and organised waste crime has been published.

## **Government and Parliament**

### [Shaping policy in the House of Lords](#)

In October 2018, Sian De Bell participated in [the] BES Parliamentary Shadowing Scheme. Check out her blog to read about her experience!

## **Exiting the EU**

### [Researchers back call for People's Vote referendum](#)

Academics have backed calls for a second referendum on leaving the European Union, after three former science ministers gave the so-called People's Vote their support and the prime minister faced growing opposition to her Brexit deal.

## **Research funding and higher education policy**

### [KEF likely to split universities into eight categories](#)

Universities are likely to be split into eight groups in the Knowledge Exchange Framework based on their size, research quality and degree of specialisation, rather than the four categories previously suggested.

## **MEPs agree to push for bigger Horizon Europe budget**

The European Parliament says it will fight for the EU's Horizon Europe R&D programme to have a budget of €120 billion, rather than the €83.5bn proposed by the Commission.

## **Schools education policy**

### **107 new STEM teachers funded by bursary**

Support scheme extended to help more people into teaching.

## **Ethics**

### **Risking the unknown in hope of a cure: The ethics of patient access to experimental treatments**

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics has today published a new briefing note highlighting the ethical issues that can arise when patients and doctors wish to use experimental treatments.

### **Commission's scientific body calls for GM legislation update**

The European Commission's Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) issued a statement on Tuesday (13 November) saying the directive on genetically modified organisms should be revised in order to adjust to the current knowledge, especially when it comes to gene editing.

### **Ban on 'gene drives' is back on the UN's agenda — worrying scientists**

Research is moving fast on the divisive genetic technology, which could help to eradicate diseases but also risks altering ecosystems in unpredictable ways.

### **Scientists divided over new research method to combat malaria**

Work on engineered gene used to modify DNA of mosquitoes 'could be stifled' by perceived risk to environment.

### **From geoengineering to gene drives: move over, moratoria**

Around this time six years ago I was in Hyderabad in India getting to grips with moratoria. Back then conversations revolved around geoengineering – techniques to reduce global warming by intervening in the Earth's climate system – and whether a ban on geoengineering research should be adopted by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD).

## **International news**

### **'Sad surprise': Amazon fish contaminated by plastic particles**

Scientists in Brazil find first evidence of plastic pollution in Amazon basin freshwater fish

### **Spain targets 100% renewable power by 2050**

Spain's government has published a new climate plan that targets a 100% renewable energy electricity system by 2050, with goals that outstrip those adopted by the EU and a ban on new gas and oil exploration.

### **Widespread plagiarism detected in many medical journals based in Africa**

Around 63% of articles from 100 sampled journals contained some text copied without attribution.

## **China's crackdown on genetics breaches could deter data sharing**

Several big biomedical companies have been caught out and punished.

## **North and South Korea team up to tackle TB and malaria**

The agreement is the first joint public-health initiative since the country's leaders met for historic talks in September.

## **Italy's olive crisis intensifies as deadly tree disease spreads**

Containment measures meant to stop a rampant bacterium have been frequently delayed.

## **Other**

### **Largest overhaul of scientific units since 1875 wins approval**

Official metal kilogram relinquishes its role to constants, but won't yet retire — and more changes to scientific units are set to come.

## **Opportunities**

### **2018 Parliamentary Shadowing scheme in Scotland open for applications**

Apply now for an opportunity to spend two days in the Scottish Parliament.

Applicants must be members of the British Ecological Society

**Closes 26 November 2018.**

### **Outreach and Engagement Grants**

The grants allow individual members of the RSB, around the world, to apply directly for funding to help run an event or activity in their region.

**Closes 15 December.**

### **School Biology Teacher of the Year Award**

Are you (or do you know) an amazing biology teacher? The Royal Society of Biology's School Biology Teacher of the Year Award aims to recognise outstanding and inspirational biology teachers. Visit the Society's website for further details.

Nominations for the 2019 award close on **21 December 2018**.

### **HE Bioscience Technician of the Year 2019 open for nominations**

The Higher Education Bioscience Technician of the Year Award has launched again for 2019. The award recognises dedicated technical staff who are carrying out superb work underpinning research and teaching at all levels in universities across the UK and Ireland. The award is open to all technical staff, at any stage in their career, employed in a teaching, research or management role in the HE bioscience sector.

**Closes 11 January 2019.**

### **Royal Society of Biology travel grants**

Student and early-career members of the Royal Society of Biology can now apply for a travel grant of £500 to support future overseas travel to attend a biology-related project or conference. Learn new lab and field techniques, gain professional development skills, and network with international academics with the support of a travel grant. Please visit the Society's [website](#) for further information and to read reports from [previous grant recipients](#). The deadline for applications is **1 March 2019**.

## Consultations

### [Single use plastic: banning the distribution and/or sale of plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England](#)

Closes 3 December 2018.

### [Calorie labelling for food and drink served outside of the home](#)

Closes 7 December 2018.

### [Southern North Sea review of consents: draft Habitats Regulations Assessment \(HRA\)](#)

Closes 13 December 2018

### [Marine licensing: proposed changes to exemptions](#)

Closes 14 December 2018.

### [Public to have say on new National Parks](#)

A call for evidence is inviting views from the public on the future of our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Closes 18 December 2018.

### [Evaluation of the legislation on medicines for children and rare diseases \(medicines for special populations\)](#)

Closes 4 January 2019.

### [Shortage occupation list 2018: call for evidence](#)

Closes 6 January 2019.

### [Committee calls for ideas from the public](#)

The Science and Technology Committee has decided again to create an open opportunity for the science community and the wider public to suggest science and technology areas for scrutiny.

Closes 8 January 2019.

### [Mental health of men and boys: inquiry launched](#)

The Women and Equalities Committee launches a new inquiry into the mental health of men and boys Ahead of International Men's Day (Monday 20 November).

Closes 18 February 2019.

## Events

### [How to increase your policy impact as a research scientist](#)

6 December, London

Join us at the latest Policy Lunchbox with Steve Ormerod, Professor of Biosciences at Cardiff University. Steve will be reflecting on the importance of academic engagement with policy. The session will also include an overview of Steve's personal experience in engaging with the policy process and how he thinks other scientists and researchers can maximise their policy impact.

### **Annual Animal Science Meeting**

The Royal Society of Biology [Animal Science Group](#) and the Home Office [Animal Science Regulation Unit](#) annual animal science meeting is in December. This meeting is aimed at active researchers, support staff and administrators in animal research.

See details of past meetings on the [RSB website](#) and to apply please email Ellie Oakley at [events@rsb.org.uk](mailto:events@rsb.org.uk)

### [Antimicrobial Chemotherapy Conference 2019: An ABC for everyone involved in developing new antimicrobials.](#)

15 January 2019, London.

## And finally...

### [Fantastic yeasts and where to find them](#)

Professor Roslyn Bill, a biotechnology specialist from Aston University, shares her top five fantastic yeasts and where to find them.

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