

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

27 March 2020

This newsletter provides links to published news articles, preserving the original title and summary line. 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

[**Coronavirus: UK brings in strict curbs on life to fight virus**](#)

Royal Society of Biology news

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

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB has developed a periodic bulletin collating some of the bioscience behind the outbreak and response, [see our webpages](#) for further information.

Health and biomedicine

[**Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): scientific evidence supporting the UK government response**](#)

The national and global response to the spread of COVID-19 continues to develop quickly and our collective knowledge of the virus is growing by the second.

[**Covid-19: How unprecedented data sharing has led to faster-than-ever outbreak research**](#)

[**Coronavirus: global crackdown sees a rise in unlicenced medical products related to COVID-19**](#)

The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) took part in the annual global coordinated operation to tackle the illegal online sale of medicines and medical devices.

[**WHO launches global megatrial of the four most promising coronavirus treatments**](#)

[**Covert coronavirus infections could be seeding new outbreaks**](#)

Scientists are rushing to estimate the proportion of people with mild or no symptoms who could be spreading the pathogen.

[**Coronavirus: How close are we to a vaccine or drug?**](#)

[**Vaccine trials among recipients of £20 million coronavirus research investment**](#)

Trials of new coronavirus vaccine among 6 projects to receive share of £20 million.

Agriculture and fisheries

Coronavirus: 'severe shock' to UK fishing as markets dry up

But some consumers might see bargains and marine life could recover if crisis goes on

Three crop rule relaxed and £6 million fund for farmers

New measures to help farmers get back on their feet and move on from floods following extreme weather and flooding across England

Forestry

Fewer oaks, more conifers: Britain's forests must change to meet climate targets

Indigenous species do not grow fast enough, so imports will have to be planted in their millions to offset emissions, expert warns

Turn around deforestation in 2020, the 'Nature Super Year', says Guterres

On the International Day of Forests, which falls on Saturday, UN chief António Guterres is calling for 2020, which has been referred to as a "nature super year", to be the year that the world turns the tide on deforestation and forestry loss.

Environment and ecology

UK's first 'super' national nature reserve created in Dorset

Seven landowners join forces to create largest lowland heathland nature reserve in UK

Warm summer of 2019 gives flight to butterfly numbers

Abundant food thanks to mix of sunshine and rain helps species confound fears of declines

We may know less about the 'amphibian apocalypse' than we thought

Scientists agree that amphibians are in trouble. But a battle over the details underscores a larger debate within the scientific community.

Water and air

World Water Day: Often overlooked, water resources are essential part of solution to climate change

On World Water Day, the United Nations launched a flagship report which says that reducing both the impacts and drivers of climate change will require major shifts in the way we use and reuse the Earth's limited water resources.

Coronavirus pandemic leading to huge drop in air pollution

'Largest scale experiment ever' shows what is possible as satellite images reveal marked fall in global nitrogen dioxide levels

Climate and energy

Cop26: Boris Johnson urged to resist calls to postpone climate talks

Expert says early cancellation due to coronavirus would damage hopes of progress

UK becomes co-chair of India-led global climate initiative

The UK was today confirmed as the first co-chair of the Governing Council on the India-led global Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

Greener petrol E10 to become standard in UK

The change will take place from 2021 under government proposals - but 700,000 cars are not approved to be used with the fuel.

The ozone layer is healing and redirecting wind flows around the globe

Fully renewable electricity could destabilise the grid – but old coal plants may have a solution

Animal Research

Why do snakes produce venom? Not for self-defence, study shows

Government and Parliament

Coronavirus: a former member of SAGE explains how the science advisory group really works

Research should be at the heart of government

In his 2014 review of research councils, Sir Paul Nurse asserted that “research should be at the heart of government”

Research funding and higher education policy

Medical students take final exams online for first time, despite student concern

Imperial College London believes the assessment of 280 students is a world first

Funders extend deadlines as coronavirus disrupts research

Project delays, as universities and labs shut down, prompt grant flexibility – but levels of leniency vary

Universities must pause unconditional offers for two weeks in student interest, says regulator

Nicola Dandridge responds to the announcement that universities should stop making unconditional offers or amending existing offers to students for two weeks.

Delivering teaching using live streaming and lecture capture

As the Covid 19 pandemic develops, universities are asking serious questions about how they can continue to successfully deliver teaching and learning. Is online streaming and lecture caption the answer?

Schools education policy

A levels to be awarded through teacher judgment and mock results

Students will also have the option of sitting an exam in September, as NUS says proposed methodology is ‘heartening’

Open access and publication policy

Editorially Surviving an Outbreak

Business and industry

Coronavirus: Robots use light beams to zap hospital viruses

Diversity and inclusion

Fears that cancelling exams will hit BAME and poor pupils worst

Experts saying basing results on predicted grades will disadvantage some students

An extra year of LEO data shows the impact of graduate background on earnings

We'll almost certainly never see a LEO release that covers all of the known non-subject non-provider characteristics that affect graduate salary.

Athena SWAN revamp urged as academics lose faith in awards

Independent steering group says new processes must stop penalising those it is supposed to help and restore confidence in the award

Outreach and engagement

Capturing Ecology: Hidden Worlds Exhibition – Ulster Museum

For six busy weeks at Ulster Museum in Belfast, our 'Capturing Ecology: Hidden Worlds' exhibition revealed the ingenious methods used to uncover the complexity of the natural world.

Digital technologies

UK app aims to help researchers track spread of coronavirus

Covid Symptom Tracker will also help experts understand who is most at risk of disease

New technology challenge to support people who are isolating

£500,000 of funding is available for technology companies who come up with digital support solutions for people who need to stay at home because of coronavirus.

Fake animal news abounds on social media as coronavirus upends life

Bogus stories of wild animals flourishing in quarantined cities gives false hope—and viral fame.

International news

WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Situation Dashboard

Why did nearly a million king penguins vanish without a trace?

We've just discovered two new shark species – but they may already be threatened by fishing

Opinion

How to help the free market fight coronavirus

Share data, boost incentives and reduce red tape to identify drugs for use in emerging coronavirus epidemics.

Coronavirus lockdown: What I learnt when I shut my cancer lab in 48 hours

Doing science during the quarantine in northern Italy has shown me that creativity needs connection.

Wildlife conservation needs to change – and the game of Jenga can help us see why

People

The physician whose 1964 vaccine beat back rubella is working to defeat the new coronavirus

Per Andersen (1930–2020)

Neuroscientist who pioneered studies of the brain's memory circuits.

Stanley Cohen, 1922–2020

Tributes paid to 'visionary researcher' who won 1986 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

Committee vacancies

Ordinary Member - Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS) Executive Committee

Closes: 30 March 2020

Opportunities

Developing sustainable plastic packaging: apply for funding

Closes: 1 April 2020

Learned Society Curation Awards

Closes: 20 April 2020

Genetics Society Summer Studentships

Closes: 30 April 2020

RSB Outreach and Engagement Award 2020

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 2020 and win up to £1500.

Closes: 26 June 2020

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2020

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2020 specimen drawing competition for 7 – 18 year olds is now open for submissions. Prizes include an experience day at the Royal Veterinary College for students, and their school can also win £100. Visit the Royal Society of Biology [website](#) for more information.

Closes: 31 July 2020

Consultations

Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook 2020: inspecting the quality of teacher education

Closes: 3 April 2020

Barriers to research with controlled drugs

Closes: 9 April 2020

UKRI Open Access Review Consultation

UKRI is reviewing its open access policies for peer-reviewed research articles and academic books that result from research supported by UKRI. UKRI will review and develop its open access policies to ensure policy is joined up across UKRI constituent bodies, encourage the development of new models of open access publishing and support the adoption of open access through collaboration and alignment with national and international partners. The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact consultation@rsb.org.uk for more information and if you would like to contribute.

Closes: 29 May 2020

Single dose of HPV vaccine: call for evidence from the JCVI

Closes: 29 April 2020

Egg, sperm and embryo storage limits

Closes: 5 May 2020

UK Science, Research and Technology Capability and Influence in Global Disease Outbreaks

Closes: 31 July 2020

Events

We are aware that a number of events previously advertised in the Science Policy Newsletter have been cancelled owing to the novel coronavirus Covid-19. We recommend checking [event webpages](#) for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

And finally...

How vampire bat friendship is surprisingly like our own

The blood-sucking mammals build friendships by starting slow and deepening over time into potentially life-saving bonds, a new study says.

The Biologist

The Society is working to ensure that there is no disruption to print copies of *The Biologist*, however, in the light of the escalating coronavirus outbreak, we would like to remind you that you can also access your subscription digitally by logging in with your RSB credentials [here](#). The forthcoming April issue looks at ways to overcome global 'vaccine hesitancy', and the amazing work of Michael Levin, the Tufts University professor who makes 'living robots' or 'xenobots' from cultured cells. You can also read *The Biologist's guide to the biology of SARS-CoV-2* online now.

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