

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

27 March 2018

The newsletter will be taking a short break over the Easter holiday and will return in the second week of April.

News

Top stories

[Biodiversity and Nature's Contributions Continue Dangerous Decline, Scientists Warn](#)

Biodiversity – the essential variety of life forms on Earth – continues to decline in every region of the world, significantly reducing nature's capacity to contribute to people's well-being.

[Europe faces 'biodiversity oblivion' after collapse in French birds, experts warn](#)

Authors of report on bird declines say intensive farming and pesticides could turn Europe's farmland into a desert that ultimately imperils all humans

Health and biomedicine

[NHS: Over 3,000 more midwifery training places offered](#)

[Coding at birth: Nuffield Council on Bioethics publishes briefing note on whole genome sequencing of babies](#)

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics has today published a briefing note that examines the ethical issues raised by whole genome sequencing of babies.

[IVF egg donor use rises sharply, HFEA figures show](#)

[PHE publishes water fluoridation health monitoring report](#)

New report shows water fluoridation helps reduce tooth decay and that there is no convincing evidence of adverse health effects.

[Fit for repurpose](#)

Drugs that can be used for new indications offer a potentially cheaper pathway – but only if the investors can recoup their costs

[We learn nothing about nutrition, claim medical students](#)

[Jeremy Hunt to announce five new medical schools as part of bid to train 1,500 extra doctors](#)

Emphasis on training doctors in areas with staff shortages will expand university places in Sunderland, Lancashire, Canterbury, Lincoln and Chelmsford

Food and drink

[A blueberry muffin 'could have day's worth of sugar'](#)

Agriculture and fishery

[EU in 'state of denial' over destructive impact of farming on wildlife](#)

EU's subsidy system, that benefits big farming rather than sustainability, needs to change to prevent ongoing collapse in birds and insect numbers, warn green groups

[Animal welfare enhanced by new code for meat chickens](#)

Updated statutory guidance part of on-going programme of reforms reflecting latest vet and animal husbandry advice

Environment and ecology

[Sadiq Khan accuses ministers of stalling over post-Brexit environment watchdog](#)

Mayor of London and green groups call for swift action after new research suggests government cuts are putting wildlife protections under threat

[Invasive species week: Floating pennywort a spreading menace](#)

Invasive species week runs till 29 March and is encouraging river users to think about non-native species and aquatic plants such as floating pennywort.

[Worsening Worldwide Land Degradation Now 'Critical', Undermining Well-Being of 3.2 Billion People](#)

Worsening land degradation caused by human activities is undermining the well-being of two fifths of humanity, driving species extinctions and intensifying climate change.

Water and air

[Pollution experts quit clean air group](#)

[£260 million of clean air funding launched by government](#)

A £220 million Clean Air Fund to tackle roadside emissions is part of a £260 million plus package to improve air quality.

Climate and energy

[Flooding and heavy rains rise 50% worldwide in a decade, figures show](#)

Such extreme weather events are now happening four times more than in 1980, according to a European science paper

[Arctic Sea Ice Missed a Record Low This Winter. Barely.](#)

Arctic sea ice behaves a bit like a human waistline, packing on weight in the winter and slimming down in the heat of summer. But while many of us struggle to lose weight, the Arctic has been struggling to gain it.

Waste

[Plastic patch in Pacific Ocean growing rapidly, study shows](#)

[Sea plastic set to treble within a decade, Government scientists warn](#)

The amount of plastic ending up in the ocean is set to treble within a decade unless action is taken, a major report has warned.

[Better biodegradables: taking 'going green' to a whole new level](#)

"Where should I put my recycling?" – a common phrase I'll hear a house guest ask if they can't spot the recycling bin in my kitchen.

Government and parliament

['Radical change' needed on countryside](#)

[Minister questioned on reducing nitrate pollution](#)

The Environmental Audit Committee continues its inquiry into nitrate. This session the Committee hears from the Minister and the Environment Agency on the government's commitments and performance on reducing nitrate pollution and on its plans for the enforcement regime post EU-exit including how cross-border pollution will be handled.

Exiting the EU

[Fisheries and Brexit](#)

Concerns raised over fisheries negotiations.

[Certainty urged on EU research relationships](#)

Minister visits Brussels to promote Scottish science and innovation.

['Vital' UK remains part of EU clinical trials, say MPs](#)

Continued participation in EU-wide clinical trials and the Horizon 2020 research programme is 'vital' to the UK's life sciences sector, according to a new cross-party report by UK MPs.

Research funding and higher education policy

[Universities receive £1.5 million to support mental health and wellbeing for postgraduate research students](#)

Funding totalling £1.5 million has been awarded by HEFCE to 17 universities in England, to improve support for the mental health and wellbeing of postgraduate research students.

[University groups push for doubling of EU research budget](#)

Increasing Framework Programme 9 backing to €160 billion (£139.7 billion) would create 650,000 jobs by 2030, says open letter

[What did we learn from the first big debate about the post-18 review?](#)

The Education Policy Institute convened the Chair of the government's review, the former universities minister, and an assortment of researchers last week to discuss the direction of HE funding – what did we agree on?

[Expectations are high for UKRI, the United Kingdom's new £6 billion research behemoth](#)

Combine U.S. agencies akin to the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, and National Endowment for the Humanities. Toss in some energy and innovation research and fuel it all with the largest boost in R&D spending in recent history. Then put one person in charge.

[UK Chief Scientific Adviser launches UK-Taiwan Innovative Industries Programme](#)

Professor Robin Grimes, Chief Scientific Adviser of the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, launches the 'UK-Taiwan Innovative Industries Programme' together with Vice President of Taiwan Dr. Chen Chien-Jen.

Open access and publication policy

[UK and US researchers 'less likely to share research data'](#)

Large worldwide survey suggests scholars in continental Europe more readily provide data alongside results

[Open access to scientific publications must become a reality by 2020 - Robert-Jan Smits](#)

A lot of lip service is being paid to making scientific papers free to access but when it comes to action there is a lot of hypocrisy, according to Robert-Jan Smits, the EU's outgoing director-general for research, science and innovation.

Equality and diversity

[First gender pay gap data paints UK universities in poor light](#)

Six higher education institutions report so far that male pay is at least 20 per cent higher than female remuneration

Public engagement

[British Science Week - inspiring the future workforce](#)

British Science Week is an annual ten-day event, now in its 24th year, celebrating science, technology, engineering and maths. Throughout this year's science week, 25 PHE scientists have visited 10 schools across England to hold interactive science workshops for 1,800 year 9 students.

[Rethink public engagement for gene editing](#)

The breadth of social and moral questions raised requires a new architecture for democratic debate, insists Simon Burall.

International news

[Congress orders USDA to restore transparency, completeness, to animal welfare reports](#)

There was an outcry from both animal welfare groups and animal research defenders 13 months ago when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) blacked out a public database containing thousands of animal welfare inspection reports, as well as records of enforcement actions that USDA took against violators of the Animal Welfare Act, including research facilities.

[The government's marine park plans are diabolical for ocean protection](#)

It is tempting to accept a poor outcome rather than nothing, but the proposed plans are neither evidence-based nor balanced.

[Norway accepts EU energy rules, avoids dispute with Brussels](#)

Norway's parliament approved the adoption of European Union energy rules on Thursday (22 March), over the objections of some centre-left parties, allowing the EU outsider to remain a full member of EU markets, the leader of the parliament said after the vote.

[Final 2018 budget bill eases biomedical researchers' policy worries](#)

The 2018 omnibus spending bill released yesterday is cheering biomedical researchers. Not only because of the 8.8% raise it gives the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—its largest in 15 years—but also because it blocks or drops several proposed policy changes that had concerned the community.

Opinion

[Bigger Is Not Better for Ocean Conservation](#)

[The PhD badly needs a doctor](#)

Professional doctorates offer a more useful, less stressful but no less rigorous alternative to the moribund PhD, says Richard Willis

[Moneysupermarket ratings will not work for university courses, Mr Gyimah](#)

Introducing a 'consumer-style ratings system' for degrees has the potential to cause terrible damage to universities and society in general, argues Cathy Shrank

People

[Professor Melanie Welham selected for the role of Executive Chair of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council](#)

Professor Melanie Welham has been selected to be the Executive Chair of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) when UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) comes into being in April 2018.

[Five UK Research and Innovation Councils announced](#)

In line with the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is establishing membership of its nine Councils.

[New Seafish Chair announced](#)

Former deputy Chair and acting Chair Brian Young will now permanently take up the role.

Opportunities

[Early Career Lecturers Survey: Professional and social barriers to success as an early career academic](#)

The Heads of University Biosciences (HUBS) advisory group, the Early Career Lecturers' Forum, are seeking to identify challenges and priorities for early career lecturers in the biosciences. If you are a recently appointed lecturer (within the past first five years) in a UK higher education institution, we would like to hear from you. Closes: 30 March 2018.

[Policy Manager Maternity Cover](#)

The British Ecological Society are seeking an enthusiastic and self-motivated individual as maternity cover for their Policy Manager. The role is open as a secondment.

Deadline for applications: 8am, 9 April 2018.

[Call for Nominations: 2018 \(34th\) International Prize for Biology](#)

The International Prize for Biology is hosted by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. Based on nominations gathered from around the world, the Prize is awarded annually to a researcher who has made an outstanding contribution to advance the biological sciences. The research field of this year's Prize is "Paleontology."
Deadline for nominations: 20 April, 2018

[The Nancy Rothwell Award 2018](#)

The Nancy Rothwell Award 2018 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.
Closes: 10 September 2018.

Consultations

[How will Brexit impact animal welfare and our environment? Asks Holyrood Committee](#)

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee launched its inquiry today, and it encourages individuals and organisations to share their views on the future of environmental and animal welfare protection in a post-Brexit world.
Deadline 29 March 2018.

[Public consultation on an EU initiative for pollinators](#)

Closes 5 April 2018.

[Public Consultation on the Establishment of the Innovation Fund](#)

Closes 10 April 2018.

[Brexit: plant and animal biosecurity inquiry launched](#)

The EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee launches a new inquiry into the impact of Brexit on the UK's plant and animal biosecurity. 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 13 April 2018.

[Your chance to influence policy on geological disposal](#)

A world-class solution for the UK's radioactive waste.
Closes 19 April 2018.

[Parliamentary Committee to scrutinise the farmed salmon industry in Scotland](#)

The future of Scotland's farmed salmon industry will come under the scrutiny of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee as it encourages individuals and organisations to share their views as part of its upcoming inquiry.
Closes 27 April 2018.

[Implementing the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards in the UK](#)

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs are seeking views on proposals for implementing the Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards (AIHTS) in the UK.
Closes 30 April 2018.

[The future for food, farming and the environment](#)

The Government is seeking views on its proposals for future agricultural policy in England. The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. We would greatly value input from members with expertise in the fields of agricultural science (pastoral and arable), food production, plant health, animal health and welfare, and scientific and technological innovation in these areas (e.g. genome editing). Please contact consultation@rsb.org.uk for more information and if you would like to contribute. Closes 8 May 2017.

Events

[Applications of plant pathology - from field to clinic](#)

This event, hosted by the Society for Applied Microbiology, in conjunction with the British Society for Plant Pathology, involves a great line up of speakers who will explore the applications of plant pathology from field to clinic; covering rapid responses to emerging pathogens, detection methods and diagnostic technologies, the plant microbiome and advancing healthcare through shared learning in plant and human health sciences.

18 April 2018, London

[Presidents' Dinner](#)

Celebrate the Royal Society of Biology's incoming and outgoing Presidents at a special drinks reception and seated dinner. This event is an excellent opportunity for members and their guests to meet and socialise with fellow members and RSB Trustees. Sponsored by Porton Biopharma, proceeds from this event will help to raise funds to support our work with schools, public engagement and early-career bioscientists. Tickets range from £15-£85. For further information contact Karen Patel at events@rsb.org.uk or on 020 7685 2569.

2 May 2018, London

And finally...

[Robotic Fish to Keep a Fishy Eye on the Health of the Oceans](#)

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