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

09 April 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 (COVID-19): scaling up testing programmes
How the government intends to scale up testing programmes to provide a test to anyone who needs one.

World’s largest trial of potential coronavirus treatments rolled out across the UK
The largest randomised clinical trial of potential coronavirus (COVID-19) treatments is underway as part of the race to find a treatment.

‘These are answers we need.’ WHO plans global study to discover true extent of coronavirus infections

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 to read previous editions and subscribe to the next.

Main RSB webpage on COVID-19
During the COVID-19 pandemic, the RSB is working to adapt and ensure our services are still delivered to the greatest extent possible whilst also taking into account Public Health England and Government advice. Please keep checking our new webpage for frequent updates with how the RSB is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

How you can help with COVID-19
The national effort to respond to the spread of COVID-19 urgently requires support. You may be able to offer help through the routes featured on this webpage.

UK government and awarding bodies announcements
In the last two weeks there have been many announcements about school closures, exams and development of processes for awarding grades. We are regularly engaging with partners and policymakers and will update this education announcements during COVID-19 pandemic page to keep teachers, schools and Universities fully informed.
Health and biomedicine

Coronavirus: Testing and why it matters

Developing antibody tests for SARS-CoV-2

What you should know about DIY masks and ventilators
Here’s what scientists and healthcare workers say about making homemade protective gear and medical supplies amid the coronavirus pandemic.

‘Don’t forget poor’ in coronavirus vaccine rush

Five things you need to know about: mRNA vaccines
The race for a vaccine against the novel coronavirus, or SARS-CoV-2, is on, with 54 different vaccines under development, two of which are already being tested in humans, according to the World Health Organization. And among the different candidates is a new player on the scene – mRNA vaccines.

Coronavirus: How ‘viral load’ and genetics could explain why young people have died from Covid-19
Scientists are racing to build database of DNA research to find any genetic reasons people may be more or less susceptible to deadly virus

New blood test can detect 50 types of cancer
System uses machine learning to offer new way to screen for hard-to-detect cancers

Peanut allergy may start in the gut – opening up new ways to tackle it

Fuller for longer? How appetite research is used – and misused

‘Immunity passports’: can they end the UK coronavirus lockdown?
Certificates to prove people are immune to Covid-19 could ease restrictions. How would such a scheme work in Britain?

Food and drink

Edible insects set to be approved by EU in ‘breakthrough moment’
Food safety agency’s decision could put mealworms, locusts and baby crickets on menus

Scientists demonstrate that white flour is the healthiest it’s been in 200 years
Despite concerns over a lack of genetic diversity, modern wheat has more health benefits

Agriculture and fisheries

Decision on sea trout netting season extension announced
A report has been published revealing the results of a five-week public consultation on extending the sea trout netting season in Yorkshire and the North East.

Rooting out ‘monster’ invasive weeds and pests from space

Environment and ecology

What does COVID-19 have to do with nature? These 5 articles explain
'Betrayal of trust': HS2 criticised over removal of woodland soils
Relocation of soil beginning at ‘completely wrong time’ for wildlife, says Woodland Trust

New advice to protect homes of England’s seahorses and seabream
Natural England has published nine new draft Conservation Advice packages to enable developers and operators to understand the impact of their proposed development on habitats and species in protected sites across England.

Climate change: Warming clips the nightingale’s wings

10 years to save ‘world’s most threatened sea turtle’

Water and air

The oceans’ twilight zone must be studied now, before it is too late
Exploitation and degradation of the mysterious layer between the sunlit ocean surface and the abyss jeopardize fish stocks and the climate.

Oceans can be successfully restored by 2050, say scientists

Climate and energy

Climate monitoring and research could fall victim to coronavirus, scientists fear
Health restrictions have already hit some long-term projects but routine monitoring could be affected if the pandemic drags on

Will the coronavirus kill the oil industry and help save the climate?
Analysts say the coronavirus and a savage price war means the oil and gas sector will never be the same again

New facility for atmospheric measurements launches April 2020

Climate-damaging products should come with smoking-style warnings
Graphic imagery should be used on petrol pumps and air tickets, experts say

Waste

How sewage could reveal true scale of coronavirus outbreak
Wastewater testing could also be used as an early-warning sign if the virus returns.

Report reveals ‘massive plastic pollution footprint’ of drinks firms
Report says plastic from Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestlé and Unilever products could cover 83 football pitches every day

UK using 1.2 billion tonnes of material a year

Animal Research

Coronavirus: Tiger at Bronx Zoo tests positive for Covid-19

Expert reaction to tiger in Bronx zoo testing positive for COVID-19

Mice have a range of facial expressions, researchers find
Findings offer researchers new ways to measure intensity of emotional responses
EARA global overview of Covid-19 research involving animals

Sheep and bacteria are helping in the fight against coronavirus – here’s how

Together with porpoise: dolphins team up to end myth of human uniqueness
Synchronous moving and calling while working together can no longer be counted a characteristic exclusive to humans, researchers say

Government and Parliament

Coronavirus: How feasible is a 'virtual Parliament’?

Research funding and higher education policy

UK research investment rises in 2018

Pandemic ‘will lead to rise in research funding with an agenda’
Virtual THE forum hears academics and funders explore how research landscape may change in wake of virus crisis

How could the coronavirus crisis change research spending?
An economic downturn prompted by the virus outbreak creates many uncertainties, but could public backing for science investment actually increase?

STFC Technicians support rapid ventilator production

Schools education policy

BBC launches daily educational shows to keep children studying
Programmes will cover key national curriculum topics while UK schools are closed

How GCSEs, AS & A levels will be awarded in summer 2020
Ofqual sets out details for schools, colleges, students, parents & carers on how GCSEs and A levels will be awarded following the cancellation of this year's exams.

Diversity and inclusion

We need more researchers in Women's History Month
This year’s event was derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Next year, we need to hear about more scientists, clinicians and engineers.

University study is designed for the privileged – students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer

Ethics

Ease rules on research into psychedelic drugs, urges David Nutt
Ex-government adviser says substances such as psilocybin could have medical value

Outreach and engagement

‘Science will withstand the coronavirus lockdown backlash’
The UK’s Science Media Centre director Fiona Fox says new visibility of experts will be crucial in combating doubts on official advice during troubled times
How to pitch science to policymakers

How to save your planet: UK Schools Outreach Project
During British Science Week 2020 the BES Education Team travelled around England to deliver outreach events in which school pupils learnt more about global environmental challenges and how to solve them.

Digital technologies

Concerned about social distancing? Satellite technology and Al can help with that.

Satellites to protect the world, if data is open to all

International news

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Situation Dashboard

How poorer countries are scrambling to prevent a coronavirus disaster
Snapshots from four nations struggling to limit deaths faster than the United States and other wealthy countries.

Coronavirus deaths ‘need new autopsy technique’

Camera traps completed one of the most thorough surveys of African rainforest yet

Opinion

Ban wildlife markets to avert pandemics, says UN biodiversity chief
Warning comes as destruction of nature increasingly seen as key driver of zoonotic diseases

Coronavirus: country comparisons are pointless unless we account for these biases in testing

Research intelligence: how to run a research team remotely
As campuses and labs close amid the coronavirus crisis, Jack Grove hears how senior scientists are managing their teams and research projects

People

Dr William Frankland, allergy scientist pioneer, dies aged 108

Q&A: We have to rethink disease detection to get ahead of the outbreak after coronavirus
We know that outbreaks like coronavirus will become more common in the future and tackling them is the Apollo programme of our time, according to Professor Marion Koopmans, head of the viroscience department at Erasmus University Medical Centre in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

The psychiatrist at the centre of the opioid crisis
Nora Volkow leads the world’s biggest funder of addiction research at a time when the United States is grappling with a devastating surge in drug use.
**Opportunities**

**Help the government increase coronavirus (COVID-19) testing capacity**

**Learned Society Curation Awards**  
Closes: 20 April 2020

**Genetics Society Summer Studentships**  
Closes: 30 April 2020

**Research and Innovation Infrastructure**  
Closes: 24 May 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

**Royal Society of Biology Photography Competition 2020**  
‘Our changing world’ is the theme of this year’s Royal Society of Biology Photography Competition. Life on Earth is dynamic and we invite you to capture these transformations. The competition has two age categories each with a cash prize: 18 and over (£1000) and under 18s (£500).  
Closes: 24 July 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

**COVID-19 Rapid Response Rolling Call**  
Closes: 1 April 2021

**Consultations**

**Online Harms and Disinformation**  
Closes: 20 April 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

**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. 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
UK Science, Research and Technology Capability and Influence in Global Disease Outbreaks
The Science and Technology Committee will inquire formally into the place of UK research, science and technology in the national and global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and what lessons should be learned for the future. 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: 31 July 2020

Events
The RSB has postponed all in person events due to take place before 1st September 2020. We will aim to reschedule, or hold virtually, all cancelled events where possible, and updated information will be made available on the RSB events pages. These events will hopefully run later in year or in 2021.

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 also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

And finally...
Whale sharks may live up to a century, Cold War bomb dating reveals
The biggest fish in the sea is more vulnerable to extinction than thought, a new study finds.

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