

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

26 June 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

##### [World first coronavirus treatment approved for NHS use by government](#)

The government has immediately authorised the NHS to use the world's first coronavirus treatment proven to reduce the risk of death.

##### ['National nature service' needed for green recovery in England, groups say](#)

A Guardian Exclusive: government must 'seize the day' to create jobs and tackle wildlife and climate crises, say a coalition of the country's biggest green groups.

#### Royal Society of Biology news

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

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB has developed a fortnightly 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](#)

The RSB is working to adapt and ensure our services are delivered to the greatest extent possible whilst also taking into account Public Health England and Government advice during the pandemic. We regularly update this [webpage](#) with relevant information about our activities, initiatives and community support.

##### [Education during COVID-19](#)

An RSB webpage listing advice, resources and announcements for schools, students and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic (last updated 22 June 2020).

#### Health and biomedicine

##### [Coronavirus: scientists uncover why some people lose their sense of smell](#)

This article describes how from the first reports coming out of Wuhan, Iran and later Italy, we knew that losing your sense of smell (anosmia) was a significant symptom of the disease. Writing in the Conversation, researchers from the University of London and the University of Reading explore a model investigating how COVID-19 may cause smell loss.

##### ['Do it at home' coronavirus saliva test trialled](#)

A new "no swab" saliva coronavirus test that lets people collect their own sample at home by spitting into a pot is being trialled in the UK.

### [Hay fever: Grass pollen DNA study could help sufferers](#)

The lives of hay fever sufferers could be changed thanks to research to identify which grass pollen causes the most common allergic reactions.

### [Dexamethasone: what is the breakthrough treatment for COVID-19?](#)

Writing in the Conversation, David Gaze, a lecturer from the University of Westminster, illustrates how research scientists have found that a cheap and widely available drug called dexamethasone could be effective in very severe forms of COVID-19.

### [World-first scheme underway to tackle AMR and protect UK patients](#)

A pioneering scheme to provide new antibiotics to NHS patients by offering to pay pharmaceutical companies upfront for their work will start this week.

### [What anxiety does to our breathing](#)

Stressful situations can cause anxiety, our body's natural response to stress. But feelings of apprehension can also be accompanied by physical effects such as rapid breathing, increased heart rate and nausea. How our brain perceives these physical changes – in particular, breathing – could be key to better understanding anxiety disorders and treating them.

## Food and drink

### [Healthier food can contain more contaminants – but there's a simple way to stay safe](#)

An article in the Conversation explores the need to fully understand the complexities of nutrition and dietary choices.

### [FSA publishes updated allergen guidance to reflect changes to labelling laws](#)

Updated technical guidance follows changes to food allergen labelling which come into effect from October 2021

### ['Bounce back' plan for agriculture, food and drink industry launched](#)

A 'bounce back' plan of trade measures for the agriculture, food and drink industry has been announced today to help support businesses that have been impacted by coronavirus.

## Agriculture and fisheries

### [COVID-19: Boosting aid for farmers from the EU rural development fund](#)

On Friday [19 June 2020], MEPs increased the crisis support that EU states should soon be able to pay to farmers and agri-food SMEs from the EU rural development fund.

### [Farmers call for green trade policy to help tackle climate change](#)

Farmers want trade deals that reflect the sector's pledge to be at net zero emissions by 2040 following the coronavirus outbreak.

## Forestry

### [Consultation launched on the England Tree Strategy](#)

Government consults on plans to update its policy for trees, woodland and forestry through creation of a new England Tree Strategy.

### [How forest loss has changed biodiversity across the globe over the last 150 years](#)

This article addresses how changes in biodiversity worldwide are linked to changes in the world's forests.

### [Climate change: Wales lags behind on planting new trees](#)

Wales is falling behind the rest of the UK in planting trees to tackle climate change, official statistics show.

## Environment and ecology

### [COVID-19 shutdowns will give wildlife only short-term relief from climate change and other threats](#)

Writing in the Conversation, researchers describe a possible silver lining to the nearly universal lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the small benefits has been a temporarily lighter human footprint in many ecosystems.

### [Pandemics result from destruction of nature, say UN and WHO](#)

Experts call for legislation and trade deals worldwide to encourage green recovery

## Water and air

### [Power sector problems see greenhouse gas target missed](#)

Problems in the power sector have seen Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions rise and the 2018 target being missed.

### [Tiny plankton tell the ocean's story – this vast marine mission has been listening](#)

Since 1931 'citizen scientists' on ships have enabled data collection on the tiny building blocks of the sea. Now this research could shape how we tackle the climate crisis

## Climate and energy

### [Adapting to climate change: how do we know if it's working?](#)

We now have a good understanding of how nature conservation needs to develop and change – there's a good set of requirements for all Bern Convention countries here. Yet with a 1.5 Celsius world now scarily close, there's a pressing need to monitor and evaluate our adaptation actions – and this is proving rather trickier than developing the actions themselves, writes Dr Olly Watts of the RSPB for the British Ecological Society.

### [Mobilising the higher education sector on climate change](#)

The cross-sector Climate Commission's work has begun. Sonya Peres reports on the commission's inaugural evidence gathering event.

## Waste

### [Why the pandemic could slash the amount of plastic waste we recycle](#)

This article explores the recycling industry and the future of plastics recycling.

## Animal Research

### [Dogs can be 'early-warning systems' for toxic chemical exposure at home](#)

Dogs and people carry remarkably similar amounts of common household chemicals in their bodies, a possible boon for human health.

## Exiting the EU

### [FSA outlines role of science in protecting consumers' interests post-EU transition](#)

Professor Guy Poppy, our outgoing Chief Scientific Adviser has today published his final CSA report focusing on the role of science and evidence in our risk analysis process.

## Research funding and higher education policy

### [UK universities look to bump income with postgraduates](#)

Increasing numbers of postgraduates appears to be a win-win, with graduates seeking refuge from a poor job market and universities able to make up for lost income, but there are concerns over the quality of those being considered

## [UK universities to provide 'significant' in-person teaching in autumn](#)

'Vast majority' of universities responding to UUK survey are planning to provide in-person teaching

## [New funds to boost student mental health through pandemic](#)

Students are to have access to a new online platform delivering targeted and high-quality mental health support, designed to respond to additional pressures caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

## Open access and publication policy

### [Equity in Scholarly Publishing: An Interview with the Workplace Equity Project](#)

The findings of the Workplace Equity Project's 2018 survey have recently been published as a peer-reviewed article in Learned Publishing - learn more in this interview with Workplace Equity Project founders.

### [Cut UK academic publishing fees by 25 per cent, urge universities](#)

'Unprecedented' financial pressure on university budgets should result in reduced subscription charges, says UUK-Jisc group

### [Peer review should be an honest, but collegial, conversation](#)

Nature asked authors and editors for advice on how to improve peer-review communication.

## Business and industry

### [Shetland plans for UK's biggest onshore wind farm to proceed](#)

Scottish energy giant SSE Renewables has said it plans to press ahead with what would be the UK's biggest onshore wind farm in Shetland.

## Diversity and inclusion

### [Gender and ethnicity graduate gap outlined by new UK data](#)

First release of Graduate Outcomes, which looks at what people are doing 15 months after leaving university, shows stark differences for some groups

### [Why we should all mourn the disruption to student outcome data](#)

However we feel about data in regulation, we should be concerned that insights into equality we need will be lost thanks to Covid-19, says Deborah Johnson, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) at London South Bank University.

## Ethics

### [Will the pandemic force universities to address the challenges of copyright?](#)

For Chris Morrison and Jane Secker the shift to online learning means educators and policy makers need to address copyright and licensing.

## Outreach and engagement

### [Four ways people stuck at home became armchair naturalists during lockdown](#)

Arguably, it's never been easier for people to get involved with citizen science. This not only helps researchers, it also helps more people appreciate the boundless wonders of nature.

## Digital technologies

### [We can make robots from gelatine and other edible ingredients](#)

Soft, edible robots that mimic real organisms could be used to deliver drugs to animals. That is just one potential application of a new material made from biodegradable gel.

## [Remote Sensing and Machine Learning](#)

There is increasing interest in using machine learning to automatically analyse remote sensing data and increase our understanding of complex environmental systems. While there are benefits from this approach, there are also some barriers to its use. This POSTnote examines the value of these approaches, and the technical and ethical challenges for wider implementation.

## [One-fifth of Earth's ocean floor is now mapped](#)

The initiative that seeks to galvanise the creation of a full map of the ocean floor says one-fifth of this task has now been completed.

## International news

### [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) Situation Dashboard](#)

### [Coronavirus around the world: Conversation authors on lessons from different countries](#)

This article features a selection from this vast new archive that highlights different approaches to controlling the pandemic around the world.

### [One of world's rarest dolphins is rebounding in Pakistan](#)

Rescue efforts have boosted the Indus dolphin's numbers, but dams on the Indus River continue to disrupt the mammal's movements.

### [Shut down 'risky' meat markets to stop disease: WWF](#)

All markets selling 'high risk' meat should be closed to stop future infectious disease outbreaks, the conservation organisation says

## Opinion

### [Why COVID-19 will end up harming the environment](#)

Even though the air has been cleaner as a result of the global lockdowns, a more polluted future has been brewing while we weren't looking.

### [Coronavirus: why it's dangerous to blindly 'follow the science' when there's no consensus yet](#)

In the face of the virus emergency, research standards have been relaxed to encourage faster publication and mistakes become inevitable. This article explores the dangers of "fast science".

### [Treatments will take the fear and helplessness out of coronavirus – here's how businesses can help find them](#)

Science will show us the way out of the COVID-19 pandemic. And businesses and philanthropy can play a major role by stepping up to fund coronavirus treatments, as well as vaccines and tests, writes Wellcome Director Jeremy Farrar.

### [Wellcome Trust launches trans inclusion policy](#)

A blog from the Wellcome Trust on their new trans inclusion policy for staff.

### [Boosting research without supporting universities is wrong-headed](#)

Universities are facing a severe financial crisis and some contract staff are hanging by a thread. Senior colleagues need to speak up now. A Nature Editorial.

## People

### [Filmmaking geneticist Samer Angelone](#)

Laetitia Tudeau, founder of Half Pint comics which features inspiring stories of PhD scientists, interviews Samer Angelone. Angelone has established a variety of courses at the University of Zurich to help scientists find their inner video storyteller.

## Opportunities

### **RSB COVID-19 Survey**

The RSB will soon be closing its [short survey](#) on how the research community has been affected by the pandemic. If you haven't already, please do fill in the 5-10 minute survey to help inform how we support the research community now and in the period afterwards.

### **How you can help with COVID-19**

An RSB webpage collating routes through which individuals and businesses can offer their help to support the national effort to respond to the spread of COVID-19.

### **Imperial COVID-19 Lockdown Lessons**

Aimed at students aged 16-18, join Professor Sara Rankin for a webinar series where she'll be chatting with Imperial researchers to find out more about the work they're doing to combat COVID-19.

### **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**

## Consultations

### **Survey on the use of models in research**

UKRI-BBSRC is consulting the research community (including academic, industrial and other researchers) on their current use of experimental systems or models for human and animal research, as well as their future perspectives.

**Closes: 28 June 2020**

### **A new UK research funding agency**

The Government has declared it intends to create a new agency to be "broadly modelled" on the US ARPA, which will provide long term funding to support visionary high-risk, high-pay off scientific, engineering, and technology ideas. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee will inquire formally into the nature and purpose of this new UK research funding agency and invites written submissions. The RSB response to this consultation is currently in draft. Please contact [consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk) for more information and if you would like to contribute.

**Closes: 30 June 2020**

### **The science of COVID-19**

The Science and Technology Committee (Lords) is investigating the scientific and technological aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the nature of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, its transmission and spread, the development of vaccines and treatments, and how digital technologies can be used for tracking and modelling. The inquiry aims to help Government and society learn from the pandemic and better prepare for future epidemics.

**Closes: 30 June 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. If you plan to submit evidence, please let us know by emailing

[consultation@rsb.org.uk](mailto:consultation@rsb.org.uk).

**Closes: 31 July 2020**

### [Plastic Packaging Tax: policy design](#)

This consultation seeks views on areas of the Plastic Packaging Tax which have been further refined as we move closer to the implementation date of April 2022.

**Closes: 20 August 2020**

### [England Tree Strategy](#)

This consultation will inform a new England Tree Strategy. It will focus on expanding, protecting and improving our woodlands, and how trees and woodlands can connect people to nature, support the economy, combat climate change and recover biodiversity.

**Closes: 11 September 2020**

### [River basin planning: Challenges and Choices](#)

The Environment Agency is holding a consultation to gather views on the challenges our waters face and the choices we all need to make to help tackle those challenges.

**Closes: 24 September 2020**

### [RSB Policy Resource Library now 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

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...

### [Birds and other animals may see colours that we cannot even imagine](#)

Birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish may see kinds of colours we can't even imagine, say researchers whose experiments with wild hummingbirds show they perceive five so-called non-spectral colours.

### [The latest issue of \*The Biologist\*](#)

A packed June issue features an interview with [Sir David Attenborough](#) as he accepts a life-time achievement award from the RSB. The issue also looks at how synthetic biologists are [creating custom spider silks without spiders](#); the possibility of [engineering trees to store more carbon](#); and the challenges of [teaching](#) and [lecturing](#) during lockdown. Plus, we explore the idea of a [new natural history GCSE](#), the [problematic language of invasive species](#), and speak to the biologists [taking action with activist groups like Extinction Rebellion](#).

### [Save 25% on new biology primers](#)

All RSB members are entitled to 25% off any titles in the Oxford Biology Primers series, normally priced at £19.99. The series has two strands, one aimed at 16-19 students hoping to further their studies ahead of university and in their first year; and a second tackling topics for graduate students and post-graduate scientists. Titles include Biochemistry, Genomics, Hormones, Human Infectious Disease and Public Health, Genetics in Medicine, Mammalian Synthetic Biology, Plant Diseases and Biosecurity, and Microbial Biotechnology. To save 25%, visit [bit.ly/OxfordRSBPrimers](https://bit.ly/OxfordRSBPrimers) and enter code RSB20 in the shopping cart.

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