

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

07 May 2021

This newsletter provides links to published news articles from a range of sources. 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

Royal Society of Biology news

An opportunity not to be missed...

[Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships 2021](#)

Bioscience undergraduates can now apply for our paid summer research projects. Successful applicants will receive a stipend of £250 per week and gain great research experience working with leading plant health researchers on 8-10 week placements. Ten research projects are available, comprising a mix of remotely-managed and in-person projects. Details of the projects, eligibility and links to apply can be found on our studentships page: www.rsb.org.uk/plant-studentships.

Closes: 13 May 2021

[COVID-19 Bulletin](#)

For further detail on COVID-19 research, news and updates, RSB produces a bulletin collating some of the bioscience behind the outbreak and response. The latest edition, published on 5th May 2021, includes updates on: SARS-CoV-2 viral variants, long COVID, airborne transmission, testing and surveillance, vaccines and immunity, research funding and the effects of the pandemic on students' lives. See [our webpages](#) to read previous editions and subscribe to the next.

Health and biomedicine

[Hancock: transforming the UK into a life sciences superpower](#)

The Health and Social Care Secretary lays out the Government's commitment to boost the UK life sciences sector and build on lessons from the pandemic.

[Living organ donation](#)

This POSTnote describes the scale and nature of living donation in the UK, its regulatory framework and the ethical considerations around this highly regulated procedure. It also analyses challenges within living organ donation, and the strategies implemented to address them.

[Opinion: To remedy health disparities, more scientists must 'get political'](#)

A Nature Editorial suggesting the pandemic has given scientists a more prominent voice in society. It suggests they need to use it to push for better health through equality.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

[MPs urge Government to level playing field for meat and seafood exporters](#)

In its new report—Seafood and Meat Exports to the EU—the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee expresses urgent concerns for exporters of highly time-sensitive fresh and live seafood and meat shipments to the EU, particularly small and medium-sized businesses.

[Farming without disturbing soil could cut agriculture's climate impact by 30% – new research](#)

The Conversation covers how scientists have discovered that an alternative approach called no-till farming could slash greenhouse gas emissions from crop production by nearly a third and increase how much carbon soils can store.

Environment and ecology

[Wildlife-friendly UK farms help Duke of Burgundy butterfly numbers take flight](#)

Formerly fluttering towards extinction, the species population has soared by 25% in a decade, reports The Guardian.

[Opinion: Wasps: why I love them, and why you should too](#)

Writing for The Conversation, Seirian Sumner, Professor of Behavioural Ecology at UCL, provides evidence for the potential value of wasps, from pest-control to pollination and sustainable food production.

[New report highlights the benefits of bringing nature into our cities](#)

Cooling our streets, reducing air pollution and improving our wellbeing, nature can provide a host of solutions to the issues facing our cities, according to a new report by the British Ecological Society.

Water and air

[House coal and wet wood restrictions come into force in England](#)

Wood stoves and open fires are a big source of PM2.5, identified by the World Health Organisation as the most serious air pollutant for human health, reports The Guardian.

[Household aerosols now release more harmful smog chemicals than cars, study finds](#)

It has led to scientists urging people to swap these products for the likes of roll-on deodorant and hair gel - as small changes can lead to large changes in air quality, says Sky News.

Climate and energy

[As glaciers disappear in Alaska, the rest of the world's ice follows](#)

Mountain glacier melt contributes more than a quarter of extra volume to the world's oceans, disrupting ancient cycles of creation, according to The Guardian.

Research funding and higher education policy

[Key COVID research hit by cut to UK foreign-aid budget](#)

UK scientists buffeted by uncertainty as the pandemic's economic fallout reduces research funds, reports Nature News.

[UK public investment in R&D rises in 2019](#)

Writing for the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE), James Tooze looks through recent figures on public investment in UK R&D.

[Opinion: It's time for coordinated action to change research culture](#)

Grace Gottlieb, Head of Research Policy at University College London, introduces a new Russell Group report that points the way to a better research culture in UK higher education.

Open access and publication policy

[Good research begins long before papers get written](#)

Publishers are redoubling their commitment to transparency and reproducibility — but they can't bring about change alone, according to this Nature Editorial.

Business and industry

[Medical oxygen should not be a luxury – scientists and engineers are trying to develop a cheaper way to produce it](#)

Writing for The Conversation, David Fairen-Jimenez, Reader in Molecular Engineering, University of Cambridge, addresses how new types of materials that store and separate gases, could provide potentially affordable solutions for devices such as oxygen concentrators.

Digital technologies

[Q&A: Nanobots could explore human cells – but their size is an engineering challenge](#)

Horizon explores how scientists are developing virus-sized robots that could defuse blood clots, explore human cells or even scrub water of impurities.

International news

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

The World Health Organisation summarises the reported number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths.

[Brazilian Amazon released more carbon than it absorbed over past 10 years](#)

An international team of researchers also found that deforestation rose nearly four-fold in 2019, says The Guardian.

[First genetically modified mosquitoes released in the United States](#)

Biotech firm Oxitec launches controversial field test of its insects in Florida after years of push-back from residents and regulatory complications, reports Nature News.

[Succulent smuggling: why are South Africa's rare desert plants vanishing?](#)

Unique species in 'the world's most biodiverse desert' are at risk from a warming planet and the lucrative plant poaching trade, reports The Guardian.

People

[New Co-Chair of the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology](#)

The Prime Minister appoints Lord Browne to the Council for Science and Technology.

[SPG written interview: Dr Rob Brooker](#)

The Scottish Policy Group (SPG) are celebrating 10 Years. As part of their virtual celebrations, the British Ecological Society is publishing a series of blogs, with this month featuring Dr Rob Brooker.

[Richard Stanford appointed as Forestry Commission Chief Executive](#)

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley has confirmed Richard Stanford as the new Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission.

Opportunities

Water Industry Film Shorts contest

RSB is supporting the Water Industry TV's new video competition, which aims to build awareness about the challenges facing the world's water systems ahead of COP26 and show how the research community is driving towards solutions. The competition is open to all and you can enter by submitting a short video of your water based project and the challenges you are trying to address. Find out more at waterindustrytv.com or on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/).

Closes: 15 May 2021

RSB ambassadors - open for applications

Are you an enthusiastic, active and engaged member of the RSB who would like to act as a key contact for the RSB at your workplace, while encouraging others to get involved? [Apply now](#) to become an [RSB ambassador](#). N.B. At this stage, we are only accepting applications from UK-based members at the AMRSB, MRSB and FRSB grade.

Closes: 31 July 2021

Consultations

[Draft update to the UK National Implementation Plan for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants \(POPs\)](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Devolved Administrations, is consulting on a draft update to the National Implementation Plan for POPs. The update covers 'new POPs' and also sets out the information available for these substances and plans to monitor and eliminate them in the future.

Closes: 14 May 2021

[Flexi-job apprenticeships: reshaping the role of apprenticeship training agencies](#)

The Department for Education is seeking views on its vision and operating framework for flexi-job apprenticeship schemes as a means to increase the use of apprenticeships in certain sectors and professions.

Closes: 1 June 2021

[Draft policy statement on environmental principles](#)

The Government is consulting on the draft policy statement on environmental principles which sets out how five internationally recognised environmental principles should be interpreted and proportionately applied. 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: 2 June 2021

[R&D Tax Reliefs](#)

The Government launched a review of R&D tax reliefs at Budget 2021. This wide ranging consultation seeks views from stakeholders on the current R&D tax relief schemes.

Closes: 2 June 2021

[Waste prevention programme for England 2021](#)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is consulting on a new Waste Prevention Programme for England: Towards a Resource Efficient Economy that sets out priorities for action to manage our resources and waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy - which means preventing waste by amongst other things increasing reuse, repair and remanufacture of products.

Closes: 10 June 2021

[Role of biomass in achieving net zero](#)

This call for evidence aims to strengthen the Government's evidence base around biomass and will contribute to a review of the potential for biomass to support the UK's net zero target.

Closes: 15 June 2021

[RSB Policy Resource Library 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

[Nature-based solutions for climate change in the UK](#)

12 May 2021

10:00 – 11:30 BST

Hear the headline findings at the launch of the British Ecological Society (BES)'s landmark report on nature-based solutions for climate change. Hosted by Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, Chair of the Environment Audit Committee of the House of Commons, lead authors will take you through the recommendations of the report and answer your questions.

[COP26: Water Adaptation & Resilience talk](#)

13 May 2021

09:00 BST

RSB is supporting a series of [Water Climate Discussions](#) in the run up to COP26. During this free event, experts from WaterAid and Water Resources South East (WRSE) will be sharing the latest developments in water-sector adaptation & resilience, required due to the impacts of climate change.

[Policy Lates: Translating potential into progress – COVID-19 vaccines](#)

25 May 2021

18:30 – 20:30 BST

This free online event, chaired by Professor Sheila Graham FRSB, will see a panel discuss successes and lessons learned in the development of COVID-19 vaccines. They will reflect on the translational research potential and wider impact for the biosciences in improving global health.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all RSB events will continue to take place online and updated information will be made available on the [RSB events pages](#). We recommend also checking other external event webpages for updates and continuing to monitor and follow official advice.

And finally...

[Evolving a bigger brain isn't always about intelligence](#)

Evolution does not consistently favour bigger brains. Instead, it's more common for mammals to have evolved smaller body sizes which makes it look like the brain is getting bigger, writes the Natural History Museum.

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