

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

17 December 2021

Dear readers, the newsletter team will be taking a winter break before returning with the next edition in January 2022. In the meantime, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your readership.

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

A year in science policy: looking back on 2021

RSB has achieved a wide range of science policy activity and impact through 2021. We've **focused on big issues for the biosciences**, including: research culture, funding and infrastructure; the [environment](#); the [use of genetic knowledge](#); and biosecurity.

To **counter misinformation and increase awareness** of policy issues including the [public health response to COVID-19](#), [plant health and biosecurity](#) and [open access publications policy](#), we published 68 editions of our newsletters (including this one!), received by over 20,000 subscribers.

As part of our ongoing and evolving [#BiosciencesForAll](#) initiative, we continued our work to **support the visibility of underrepresented communities in the biosciences**. To celebrate Pride this year, RSB shared [information about LGBT+ representation](#) in STEM on social media, and as part of Black History Month in October, we used our Twitter platform to [amplify and applaud initiatives](#), social enterprises, networks and organisations aiming to support Black students and researchers in STEM.

To **convene bioscientists to discuss current issues and evidence** directly with one another, and with policy makers including [regulators](#) and [research funders](#), we collaborated on and hosted over 60 online events and meetings. [Parliamentary Links Day](#), [Voice of the Future](#), our [Policy Lates](#) series, annual [Animal Science Meeting](#), and Natural Capital Initiative ([NCI](#)) [debates](#) drew broad national and international audiences. Talks and discussion meetings held with our [Member Organisations](#), and other members of our focus groups and committees, covered a wide range of matters: from social and ethical issues in genome editing and farmed animal breeding, to the needs of the antimicrobial resistance research community; from best practice in bioscience community diversity data collection and use, to driving development and innovation in the UK agricultural sector.

We **brought the expertise of our professional membership direct to policy makers** in Government, Parliament and beyond, through 17 letters, statements, reports and responses. We wrote to the Prime Minister on [Global Challenges Research Fund cuts](#) in March, on climate and nature [ahead of COP26](#), and with other science societies to reiterate the importance of association to Horizon Europe, in November. Through August and September, we wrote to the Chief Scientific Advisor about supporting excellent outcomes in clinical research, animal welfare and public health, and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the [Spending Review](#). Our many additional [responses](#) to calls for evidence provided bioscience expertise on animal sentience, environmental principles, regulation of genetic technologies, equity in the STEM workforce,

animal welfare in transport, and innovation and regulatory reform. We continue to deposit these in our [RSB Policy Resource Library](#), for all to freely access.

To **support the next generation of bioscientists** to gain policy experience, we welcomed two [UKRI policy interns](#) into our staff team. In the lead-up to our [Plant Health Summit for Future Leaders](#) in March, 150 early career professionals formed a new plant health network. Over the summer, we arranged for 10 students to carry out summer projects meeting [Defra](#) science priorities through our [Plant Health Undergraduate Studentships](#) programme. Defra have since awarded us funding for a multi-year follow-on project to support early career researchers in the plant sciences.

As always, all this would not have been possible without the expertise, dedication, determination and ongoing support of our [members](#), partners, collaborators, volunteers and [staff team](#). Thank you, and onward to 2022!

Health and biomedicine

[**Replicating scientific results is tough — but essential**](#)

A high-profile replication study in cancer biology has obtained disappointing results. According to this *Nature* Editorial, scientists must redouble their efforts to find out why.

[**FCDO launches new approach to improving global health**](#)

A Government press release describes how the UK reaffirms its commitment to improving health around the world through development, diplomacy and research.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

[**City allotments could be as productive as conventional farms, research finds**](#)

Scientists say a two-year pilot study in Brighton and Hove shows the value of urban food production, writes the *Guardian*.

[**Food firms ask Government to fix supply chain crisis**](#)

Food industry representatives have warned that the UK is facing a 'worsening food supply chain crisis' without sufficient help from the Government, reports BBC News.

[**'Disastrous' plastic use in farming threatens food safety – UN**](#)

The *Guardian* covers a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, which says most plastics are burned, buried or lost after use.

Forestry

[**Tropical forests can partially regenerate in just 20 years without human interference**](#)

A study finds natural regrowth yields better results than human plantings and offers hope for climate recovery, reports the *Guardian*.

[**National Trust to fell at least 30,000 trees hit by ash dieback**](#)

The *Guardian* covers the National Trust's warning of a 'catastrophic' increase in tree and plant disease because of climate breakdown.

[**Environment Agency celebrates planting over 80,000 trees in Cumbria**](#)

The Government has stated that the Environment Agency projects have seen 80,000 trees planted across Cumbria in the last 12 years.

Environment and ecology

The sky's the limit: Using airborne DNA to monitor insect biodiversity

Scientists at Lund University have discovered for the first time that it is possible to detect insect DNA in the air. This offers scope for exploring a whole new way to monitor terrestrial biodiversity, writes the British Ecological Society Press Office.

Dragonflies and damselflies disappearing as wetlands are lost

Researchers say the loss of marshes, bogs and swamps is driving a rapid, global decline in dragonflies, reports BBC News.

Solar parks could boost bumble bee numbers in a win-win for nature

New research shows that simple changes to how UK solar parks are managed could boost ground nesting bumble bee populations in the parks and surrounding areas, providing an additional benefit on top of renewable energy, writes the British Ecological Society Press Office.

Water and air

7m tonnes of raw sewage a year discharged into Northern Irish rivers

An Assembly member urges a £2bn boost for sewage infrastructure as the report reveals poor health of waterways, according to the Guardian.

Climate and energy

Opinion: Legacy of COP 26: solving the climate crisis will be people-led, not science-led

Writing for Wonkhe, science policy intern Amanda Ribeiro, San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), extracts lessons for the scientific community from attending COP26.

Opinion: Build solar-energy systems to last — save billions

To withstand extreme weather, rapid innovation and rock-bottom prices, solar installations need tighter quality control, standards and testing, according to Nature Comment.

Climate change: How will Wales go green by 2050?

BBC News covers the Welsh government's plan for how Wales will rely only on renewable energy by 2050.

Waste

Deposit return scheme: Cash for recycling can help meet zero waste goals

A pilot scheme has found a cash for recycling system that could help Wales meet its zero waste goals, reports BBC News.

Recycling: Are soft plastics the final frontier?

BBC News examines the disposal of soft plastics.

University of Portsmouth study finds 9,000% increase in face mask litter

BBC News covers how university researchers are urging the Government to prevent an 'environmental disaster' caused by face mask litter.

Research funding and higher education policy

Opinion: The future of REF: Driving a culture to maximise high-quality research and impact

Throughout the latest Research Excellence Framework, researchers at RAND Europe were tracking academics' experience in real time. Writing for Wonkhe, Catriona Manville, Camilla d'Angelo and Susan Guthrie report on what they found.

Fears half of poorer pupils in England could be barred from university

An analysis shows plans for a higher GCSE threshold could disqualify 48% of disadvantaged students and hit the north harder than the south, reports the Guardian.

Online academic conferences showing wide benefit

Times Higher Education covers how a broad data analysis by a US team found ending in-person conferences during Covid has been tied to substantial gains in equity, sustainability and inclusiveness.

Schools education policy

Attainment gap in primary schools wider since Covid

The attainment gap between primary school pupils from the most and least deprived areas of Scotland appears to have widened during the Covid pandemic, reports BBC News.

Business and industry

Government invests over £116 million to drive forward green innovation in the UK

The Government has stated that the funding will boost green innovation across the UK as efforts to help businesses reduce their carbon emissions continue.

Diversity and inclusion

Cambridge institute's fellowship 'supports black scientists'

A fellowship has been set up to support the training and career development of black scientists, reports BBC News.

Digital technologies

Opinion: AI driving digital transformation and creating significant value

AI is making a big difference to businesses, driving digital transformation, and could add £630 billion gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy, according to Esra Kasapoglu, Director of AI and Data Economy, Innovate UK.

International news

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Situation Dashboard

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

Opinion: Brazil is in water crisis — it needs a drought plan

To avoid crop failures and soaring power costs, Brazil needs to diversify sources, monitor soil moisture, model local hydroclimate dynamics and treat water as a national security priority, writes Nature Comment.

Netherlands announces €25bn plan to radically reduce livestock numbers

A programme to tackle the pollution crisis caused by an overload of manure faces fierce opposition from farmers, reports the Guardian.

Coral reefs at risk of being wiped out in western Indian Ocean

The Natural History Museum covers how some of the world's most picturesque coral reefs are at risk of being wiped out in the next 50 years.

People

Breaking it down: UKHSA scientist makes Nature's top 10 of 2021

A Government news story covers how Meaghan Kall, an epidemiologist at UKHSA has been included in Nature magazine's global top 10 list of people who helped shape science in 2021.

Q&A: On Nobel Prize-quality discoveries, scientific breakthroughs and unicorns

As the world's newest Nobel Prize laureates gather for Nobel Week, EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel speaks to Horizon about the incredible advancements made by scientists and the EU's commitment to creating more tech unicorns.

Q&A: 'My medical colleagues learn from my disability'

SciDev.Net covers how Daniella Akellot's research on gluteal fibrosis, a condition that limits the amount of movement in sufferers' hips, has contributed to the development of a basic surgical procedure that has proven successful for children.

Opportunities

Opportunity for bioscience students

The [QAA Biosciences Benchmark Statement Advisory Group](#) is looking for final year undergraduates, postgraduates or recent graduates to join the group and review the QAA's Subject Benchmark Statement (SBS) for the biosciences. The SBS is a crucial document, which helps academics across the UK design and develop biosciences programmes. It ensures that appropriate standards are set, and that graduates are equipped with the right knowledge and skills for a successful career. To apply, complete the [application form](#) and submit it to Georgia Clarke at g.clarke@qaa.ac.uk before midnight on **Tuesday 4th January 2022**.

The Royal Society of Biology is recruiting to two new posts:

- Associate Director of Parliamentary and Public Affairs
- Press Officer (0.5 fte)

Associate Director of Parliamentary and Public Affairs

We are seeking an experienced communicator with a strong vision and the ability to bring people together. This new role will work to strengthen links between policymakers and the bioscience community, as well as shape and promote excellent bioscience communication and engagement.

Press Officer (part time)

We are looking for an enthusiastic and adept writer and communicator with an ambition to see excellent presentation of bioscience views and issues in public. You will have the opportunity to work with a team focused on engagement and communication and to contribute across all areas of the Society's work.

For both roles please see our listings at <https://my.rsb.org.uk/services.php?section=jobs> with applications open until 09.00 on **Monday 10th January 2022**.

Consultations

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant

The Scottish Funding Council is seeking views on proposals for changes to the Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant to take effect from Academic Year 2022-23.

Closes: 12 January 2022

Diversity in STEM

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee has launched an inquiry to investigate the extent of underrepresentation amongst those working in STEM and ask what policies the Government, industry, and academia could use to address it.

Closes: 14 January 2022

[**The 7th Quinquennial Review of Schedules 5 & 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act**](#)

The Country Nature Conservation Bodies in Great Britain (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and NatureScot), working jointly through the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, review Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, concerning plant and animal species to be protected from persecution in the wild. As part of the review, stakeholders are provided with the opportunity to submit evidence and views.

Closes: 30 January 2022

[**Commonly littered and problematic plastic items**](#)

Defra is asking for evidence to help determine future single-use plastic policy.

Closes: 12 February 2022

[**Proposals to ban commonly littered single-use plastic items in England**](#)

Defra wants your views on a plan to ban the supply of single-use plastic items and polystyrene food and drink containers.

Closes: 12 February 2022

[**Implementing due diligence on forest risk commodities**](#)

Defra are consulting on the implementation of world-leading due diligence provisions in the Environment Act to help tackle illegal deforestation in UK supply chains.

Closes: 11 March 2022

[**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

[**LGBTQ+ STEMinar 2022**](#)

14 January 2022

The conference is designed for people who work or study in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and are LGBTQ+. The day aims to showcase work from diverse fields and to encourage collaborations between different departments, universities, companies and disciplines. The event will be a hybrid in-person/online event. Please note the registration closing dates differ for online only or in person attendees.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic most 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...

[**Listen to the fish sing: scientists record ‘mind-blowing’ noises of restored coral reef**](#)

The Guardian covers how a vibrant soundscape shows Indonesian reef devastated by blast fishing is returning to health.

[**The Biologist**](#)

The latest issue of *The Biologist* explores the RSB's [major new set of recommendations for biology curricula in the UK](#), and how [citizen scientists can help find superbug-killing viruses in their local environment](#).

Respiratory paediatrician Thomas Williams looks at how [measures designed to restrict the spread of COVID-19 are causing unpredictable disease dynamics](#) in common childhood respiratory diseases such as RSV, and Karen Ambrose explains how The Francis Crick Institute is aiming to create a [more diverse, inclusive and welcoming working environment](#). Plus, biochemist and textbook author Denis Murphy FRSB argues [that it is time to phase out eponymous terms like Krebs and Calvin from scientific terminology](#).

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