

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

25 November 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

Top stories

[Universities to combat race bias in research](#)

Universities have launched schemes to attract hundreds of ethnic minority students into research, reports BBC News.

Health and biomedicine

[Review launched into the health impact of potential bias in medical devices](#)

The Government has stated an independent review will look at potential bias in items like oxygen measuring devices and the impact on patients from different ethnic groups.

[Universal healthcare ‘shouldn’t cost the earth’](#)

SciDev.Net explores how, according to an analysis published in The BMJ, healthcare in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is high-carbon and emissions will increase as coverage extends.

[New Alzheimer’s treatment hailed by researchers](#)

Early results in a new treatment for one of the most common forms of dementia have been ‘absolutely spectacular’ according to researchers, reports BBC News.

Food and drink

[FSA and UKRI join forces with the public to explore food safety](#)

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) are awarding a total of £200,000 to fund six projects to bring the public and researchers together to investigate food standards challenges.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

[£27 million for farmers to boost productivity](#)

The Government has urged farmers, foresters and growers from across England to apply for grants to buy new equipment and infrastructure, with the aim to help improve efficiency, productivity and sustainability.

[Cefas and industry science collaborations: Fisheries monitoring, the electronic age](#)

Rebecca Skirrow, technical lead on Cefas’ Scientific Remote Electronic Monitoring Programme, explores how the uptake of technologies can assist with fisheries management.

Environment and ecology

[Ocean scientists call for global tracking of oxygen loss that causes dead zones](#)

Scientists from six continents say a monitoring system could help protect coral reefs and fisheries around the world, reports the Guardian.

[Smaller than a grain of sand, phytoplankton are key to aquatic health](#)

Scientists are inching closer to revealing the elusive mechanisms that tiny marine species activate to transform organic contaminants in water into less toxic chemicals, writes Horizon.

[Bees may take generations to recover from one exposure to insecticides](#)

The Guardian reports on a study which shows reduced reproduction and other negative impacts on the performance of species.

Climate and energy

[University alliance takes climate crisis 'action'](#)

Experts from four universities have come together to form a regional alliance to tackle climate change, reports BBC News.

[Could negative emissions actually help curb climate change?](#)

Many future climate scenarios suggest that negative emissions will be needed to limit global warming. Horizon examines how researchers are now investigating how feasible this is.

[Scientists improving the 'crystal ball' for better climate predictions](#)

Horizon covers why it's necessary to keep developing and refining climate models to better support climate policies.

Waste

[What's holding up Scotland's bottle deposit scheme?](#)

Scotland's bottle return scheme seems likely to suffer further days, with the Scottish Government blaming Covid-19, Brexit and a row over tax rules, writes BBC News.

[Plastic pollution: New meat tray 'could save tonnes of waste'](#)

BBC News covers how a new type of recyclable meat packaging tray designed by a Swansea University student could save thousands of tonnes in plastic waste.

[Plans unveiled to ban single-use plastics](#)

The Government has stated that single-use cutlery and plates could be banned in England as part of a public consultation, and a call for evidence has also been launched to tackle other problematic plastics.

[UK must boost recycling of materials for green industries, report says](#)

Green Alliance says all critical raw material demands for low carbon technologies could be met from secondary materials by 2050, writes the Guardian.

Animal research

[Lobsters, octopus and crabs recognised as sentient beings](#)

A Government news story covers how an amendment to the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill follows the London School of Economics and Political Science research findings on decapod and cephalopod sentience.

Research funding and higher education policy

[Relief as UK's 'very high quality' global research hubs saved](#)

UK Research and Innovation confirms massive cuts to GCRF-funded research hubs will not continue next year after they won praise from a Whitehall review, reports Times Higher Education.

[NERC's Discovery Science fund to empower adventurous research](#)

The Natural Environment Research Council is transforming its Discovery Science portfolio and increasing investment to encourage adventurous and ambitious science.

['Strike early' to cultivate tomorrow's researchers](#)

Times Higher Education covers how research at the undergraduate level engages students and helps keep the academic pipeline flowing.

Diversity and inclusion

[Opinion: Engineering 'must change' to include everyone](#)

BBC News covers how one university is changing the way it teaches to break down barriers for students with autism, and other conditions known as 'neurodiversity'.

International news

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

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

[China creates vast research infrastructure to support ambitious climate goals](#)

Carbon-neutrality institutes, and other initiatives to support a pledge to achieve net zero by 2060, are popping up like mushrooms across China, according to Nature News.

[Deforestation: Which countries are still cutting down trees?](#)

BBC News covers how Brazil's Amazon rainforest has hit its highest level in over 15 years - and progress elsewhere is challenging.

[Palm oil industry unprepared for climate change, finds ZSL study](#)

Analysis by the Zoological Society of London finds that 93% of palm oil producers have not assessed climate risk, despite the industry contributing significantly to the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Opportunities

[Higher Education Bioscience Teacher of the Year Award](#)

Now open for nominations, the award aims to identify the UK's leading bioscience higher education (HE) teachers, recognising the invaluable role they play in educating and inspiring the next generation of biologists. If you know a bioscience lecturer who deserves recognition for their passion and ideas, encourage them to submit an application this year.

Closes: 30 November 2021

[BioArtAttack 2021](#)

Get creative and submit an entry for our [BioArtAttack 2021](#) competition! Your entry could be a drawing, collage or even a sculpture, taking inspiration from the smallest or the largest parts of the living world. [Submit a photograph](#) of your BioArtAttack online and [visit our website](#) for further information.

Closes: 30 November 2021

[STEM for BRITAIN 2022](#)

STEM for BRITAIN is a poster competition for early-stage researchers which is held in the Houses of Parliament. Applications are invited in five subject categories: Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Physics, Engineering, Mathematical Sciences and Chemistry. Finalists will be invited to an event in the Houses of Parliament where they will present their poster to Parliamentarians and the subject judges.

Closes: 6 December 2021

Consultations

[Plant biosecurity strategy for Great Britain](#)

Defra wants to know your views on how the Government, the plant industry, and the public can help improve plant biosecurity in Great Britain.

Closes: 30 November 2021

[Labelling for animal welfare](#)

Defra wants to know what you think about possible reforms to food labelling for animal welfare. The aim is to give Defra an understanding of how this might impact business, farmers, and consumers.

Closes: 6 December 2021

[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

[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

[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

[Young Marine Biologist Summit](#)

27 – 28 November 2021

10:00 – 16:00 GMT

If you are a young, aspiring marine biologist, join The Marine Biological Association and the Save Our Seas Foundation for high profile, inspirational speakers from around the world, prizes, career advice & more at the 5th Annual Young Marine Biologist Summit. This year's theme is Ocean Predators. This year's event is free to attend and will take place online. Please visit the [YMB event website](#) for more information and to view the full programme.

[Equality, Diversity, Inclusion in Science and Health Virtual Symposium 2021](#)

8 – 9 December 2021

The EDIS Symposium 2021 is bringing together diverse voices within the science and health research sector. It is an opportunity to share progress of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work by EDIS members and the wider community and highlight future changes. The agenda and sessions will link the research system together through application of EDI concepts to research design, careers, and culture.

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...

[Ants swap spit to help them live for longer](#)

Ants swap chemicals in their 'spit' to support the most valuable members of the colony, reports the Natural History Museum.

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