

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

**24 March 2023**

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

##### [UK International Technology Strategy](#)

This Government policy paper sets out an approach to making the UK a science and technology superpower by 2030.

#### Royal Society of Biology news

##### [Young scientists quiz key political figures at VOF 2023](#)

Young and early career scientists were given the chance to voice their questions about the future of science to MPs, ministers and Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor.

#### Health and biomedicine

##### [Pholcodine cough medicines withdrawn in UK over allergy fears](#)

Pharmacists were told to stop supplying 20 brands after a review found raised risk of rare anaphylaxis in people who later have a general anaesthetic, reports the Guardian.

##### [55 countries face a health worker crunch linked to COVID-19: WHO](#)

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently said that no less than 55 countries are struggling with serious health worker shortages as they continue to seek better-paid opportunities in wealthier nations that have stepped up efforts to recruit them amid the COVID-19 pandemic, according to United Nations (UN) News.

##### [Opinion: Air pollution can increase the risk of COVID infection and severe disease – a roundup of what we know](#)

Writing for The Conversation, Samuel J. White, senior lecturer in genetic immunology, Nottingham Trent University, and Philippe B. Wilson, professor of one health, Nottingham Trent University, cover how air quality affects COVID risk – both in terms of the likelihood of contracting COVID and how sick people get with the infection.

#### Food and drink

##### [Black Sea Grain Initiative extended on deadline day](#)

The Black Sea Grain Initiative, an UN-brokered deal aimed at supplying markets with food and fertiliser amid global shortages and rising prices, exacerbated by the Ukraine war, was extended on the day it was due to expire, reports United Nations News.

## [Think local, says new FAO report, pointing towards 'hunger-free and healthy' Europe, Central Asia](#)

Eight UN agencies published a new report aimed at helping countries address chronic food insecurity and nutrition crises across Europe and Central Asia, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, writes United Nations News.

## Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

### [Use of colistin in animal feed is increasing antibiotic resistance amongst humans](#)

The antibiotic colistin is being widely used to prevent infections and promote growth in animals grown for human consumption, such as poultry, a new study at the University of Oxford has found.

## Water and air

### [Five things you should know about the UN 2023 Water Conference](#)

The UN 2023 Water Conference, which takes place at UN Headquarters from 22nd – 24th March, is being hailed as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to accelerate progress towards universal access to safe water and sanitation by 2030, according to United Nations News.

### [The world faces a water crisis — 4 powerful charts show how](#)

Hundreds of millions of people lack access to safe water and sanitation. This Nature News Explainer asks 'will the first UN conference on water in nearly 50 years make a difference?'

## Climate and energy

### [Climate change 'survival guide' finds 1.5oC is achievable, but needs urgent action](#)

The latest report from the UN's climate advisors reveals that the world is more than capable of tackling climate change, but current action simply isn't enough, writes the Natural History Museum.

### [Opinion: What is equality of data? Climate experts explain](#)

It's not enough to just have more data on climate and health. There must also be data equity or 'equality of data'. Two Wellcome experts in climate and health, explain what that means.

### [New process captures carbon dioxide equivalent to forest the size of Germany](#)

New research suggests that around 0.5% of global carbon emissions could be captured during the normal crushing process of rocks commonly used in construction, reports UK Research and Innovation.

## Waste

### [Nuclear waste: Public to have a say on plans to bury radioactive material](#)

Cumbria and Lincolnshire communities are being consulted about the possibility of building a geological disposal facility where nuclear waste would be buried under the seabed, reports Sky News.

## Animal research

### [Common sweetener suppresses mouse immune system — in high doses](#)

The finding suggests that the sugar substitute sucralose could one day be used to treat autoimmune conditions, reports Nature News.

### [Working with European partners to reduce the risk of pathogens entering the food chain](#)

Dr Richard Smith, lead analytical epidemiologist, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, explains how scientists joined with experts in 12 European countries to reduce the spread of *Salmonella* and hepatitis E virus in pigs, helping to limit the risk to public health.

### [Breeding birds in captivity may alter their wing shapes and reduce post-release survival chances](#)

Research into the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot finds that a 1mm difference in length of one feather is enough to reduce the survival rate by 2.7 times, reports the Guardian.

### [How disgust-related avoidance behaviours help animals survive](#)

The British Ecological Society covers how an international team led by Dr Cecile Sarabian from the University of Hong Kong (HKU) examines the use of disgust-related avoidance behaviours amongst animals and their role in survival strategy.

## Research funding and higher education policy

### [BBSRC biotech boost drives UK towards circular bioeconomy](#)

Research helping to build a more sustainable circular bioeconomy has been boosted by the announcement of BBSRC's £5.3 million circular bioeconomy fund, writes UK Research and Innovation.

### [Universities take steps to address cost of living as poll highlights impact on students](#)

Universities and colleges are taking steps to address the impact of inflation on their students as new polling for the Office for Students suggests that nearly one in five students say they are considering dropping out because of the rising cost of living.

### [Physiology is at the heart of Scottish research to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#)

The Scottish Funding Council's Strategic Plan 2022-27 notes their ambition for 'Building a connected, agile, sustainable tertiary education and research system for Scotland'. This aligns succinctly with the ambitions of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), writes The Physiological Society.

## Schools education policy

### [Schools across the North East recognised for their commitment to welcoming nature into school grounds](#)

On the 14th March 2023, the British Ecological Society celebrated the resounding success of their 'Connecting Schools to Nature' project, which has seen over 5,000 primary school children introduced to nature within their school grounds.

### [Education Committee launches new inquiry into teacher recruitment, training, and retention](#)

The House of Commons Education Committee has launched a new inquiry into teacher recruitment, training and retention in state-funded English schools.

## Open access and publication policy

### [Opinion: Open Access Beyond Scholarly Journals](#)

Writing for The Scholarly Kitchen, Thilo Koerker, publisher of the New Ground journal, presents a new publication, aimed at filling the gap between the popular science magazine Scientific American and the highly technical specialist language of research journals.

## Business and industry

### [£100m R&D levelling up funding awarded to accelerate innovation](#)

The Innovation Accelerators programme is investing £100 million in 26 projects to accelerate the growth of three high-potential innovation clusters, reports UK Research and Innovation.

## Diversity and inclusion

### [Opinion: How HE forces neurodivergent people to adapt](#)

Writing for Wonkhe, Beth Sennett, learning designer and specialist study skills tutor, Falmouth University, explains the ways in which higher education forces neurodivergent colleagues to mask their true selves.

### [Flagship UN gender event closes with 'blueprint' for greater role of women in tech](#)

The 2023 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 67), the largest United Nations gathering on gender equality, successfully wrapped up, with Member States calling for a full and equal participation of women and girls in the development of digital technologies, according to United Nations News.

### [RSC grants aim to tackle 'shocking' lack of black UK chemists](#)

The three-year scheme will support institutional projects that address racism and racial inequalities, reports Times Higher Education.

## Digital technologies

### [GPT-4 is here: what scientists think](#)

Researchers are excited about the AI — but many are frustrated that its underlying engineering is cloaked in secrecy, writes Nature News.

### [AI makes plagiarism harder to detect, argue academics – in paper written by chatbot](#)

Lecturers say programs capable of writing competent student coursework threaten academic integrity, according to the Guardian.

## International news

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

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

### [500 baby sharks to be released: An exclusive look at an unprecedented mission](#)

A team spanning 15 countries is raising endangered sharks from aquariums and reintroducing them to the wild, starting in Indonesia. It's never been done at this scale, but experts think the plan might work.

### [How the US will remove 'forever chemicals' from its drinking water](#)

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed a strict PFAS limit, but it will take money and innovative technologies to implement the plan, writes Nature News.

### [Extinctions on the island of the dodo are pushing plants towards extinction](#)

Plants on the island of Mauritius are at risk of extinction because only a handful of the native animals that can spread their seeds survive, according to the Natural History Museum.

## People

### [Philip Duffy appointed new Environment Agency Chief Executive](#)

Philip Duffy has been appointed as the new Chief Executive of the Environment Agency and will start in the role on 1st July 2023, according to this Government press release.

### [Announcing new youth advisers, Guterres praises their 'unrelenting' drive for climate justice](#)

UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the names of seven young climate leaders selected to serve on his Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, reports United Nations News.

## Committee vacancies

### [The RSB Animal Science Group is seeking applications to appoint a new chair](#)

The RSB Animal Science Group has an important role in advising on and representing the Society's views on animal science through a range of strategic activities, including in science policy. The group brings together representatives from the RSB member organisations with an interest in the funding, conduct and impact of biological research involving animals. The role of chair offers a key opportunity to lead the group in contributing to, advising and influencing the policy, strategy and outputs of the RSB. Full details, including the role description, selection criteria and the application process can be found [online on mySociety](#).

**Closes: 2 April 2023**

## Opportunities

### [Volunteer with The Big Bang](#)

Are you keen to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers? Volunteer with the Big Bang! From facilitating activities at The Big Bang Fair, to judging student STEM projects there's something for everyone.

**Closes: 3 April 2023**

### [International 3Rs prize](#)

Have you published a paper in the past three years that could have major 3Rs impacts, whether the 3Rs were a primary focus of your work or a secondary benefit? Wherever you are in the world, you can apply for the NC3Rs' International 3Rs Prize. This prestigious annual award, sponsored by GSK, consists of a £2k personal award and a £28k prize grant to further the 3Rs impact of the winning research. Researchers in any field of academia or industry are eligible.

**Closes: 5 April 2023**

### [Science Policy: Improving the Uptake of Research into UK Policy](#)

Applications for the fifth Science Policy course (21-23 August 2023), organised by the Wellcome Sanger Institute, the House of Commons Science and Technology select committee and the Royal Society of Biology, are open. Through expert presentations, discussion, group activities, and networking course participants will develop a comprehensive understanding of how, and when, research can impact the process of creating policy. You can explore the programme and [apply to the course online](#).

**Closes: 27 June 2023**

### [BioArtAttack \(2D\) 2023](#)

The Royal Society of Biology's [BioArtAttack \(2D\) 2023 \(Formerly The Nancy Rothwell Award\)](#) is a children's 2D art drawing and painting competition for 7 – 18 year olds to draw or paint their favourite animal, plant or fungi. The competition is now open for submissions, and prizes include £50 for winning students. Visit the Royal Society of Biology's [website](#) for more information.

**Closes: 29 July 2023**

### [Field Studies Council Signs of Spring](#)

As part of the Field Studies Council (FSC) #ClimateEnquiry series, FSC would love you to take part in recording some signs of Spring by looking out for indicator species or events and recording when you notice them. Anytime you are out in your local area, FSC would like you to look out for the following signs of Spring...bumble bees, daffodils, first lawn cut, frog spawn and hazel catkins. You can record your sightings here <https://arcg.is/Oqj8TC1>. The results of the survey can be viewed live on the Field Studies Council website – [click here](#).

### [RSB Ambassador](#)

Play a key role in broadening the RSB's reach and engagement in your workplace by becoming an RSB ambassador. Members at the AMRSB, MRSB and FRBSB grades are invited to submit an

application for this volunteer role promoting the biosciences. For more information visit the [website](#) and contact [ambassadors@rsb.org.uk](mailto:ambassadors@rsb.org.uk) with any queries.

### **Gopher Science Lab grants**

The Royal Society of Biology is offering state-funded secondary schools in the UK an opportunity for two teachers to host a [Gopher Science Lab](#), lab day with invited primary schools, in their school or held as a hybrid event, and supported by a small grant of £500. This includes access to RSB's [Gopher Science Lab online training course](#) to enable the school to train some of its students to deliver the lab day teaching with support from the two lead science teachers. Secondary school teachers working in UK based, state-funded, secondary schools can email [Amanda Hardy](#) to apply on behalf of their school for a small grant, which is intended to support schools and their students who for financial reasons would not otherwise have the opportunity to run their own lab day.

### **Biology Week will be 16th – 20th October 2023**

Our next Biology Week will be 16th – 20th October 2023. Take part and help us celebrate the biosciences. If you want to start planning for Biology Week 2023 please check out our [website](#) to find out more, including an online guide for hints, tips and inspiration. More details will be put online over the coming months in the lead up to the week itself.

### **Ideas wanted from MRSB and FRSB members please**

Are you a research active MRSB or FRSB member of the Royal Society of Biology, working in any bioscience research specialism, in any research setting? If you answered yes to all these questions we are looking for your ideas for a mass participation project featuring or generating research data that could be published. We want ideas to get various public audiences involved and engaging with real bioscience research. So if you answered yes to these questions and want a lot of people to take part in your research to generate big data, to highlight your research to a wider audience and to make participating in bioscience research fun for the people who take part please email [Amanda Hardy](#) to share your ideas.

## Consultations

### **Review of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013**

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate wants to know what you think about proposed changes to the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 as they apply in Great Britain. The proposed changes aim to modernise the Regulations, make them more effective and reduce regulatory burden where possible. Improved clarity and consistency in the Regulations will create more certainty for those involved in the health and welfare of animals.

**Closes: 31 March 2023**

### **Emerging diseases and learnings from COVID-19**

The Science and Technology Committee is seeking to examine how the Government is applying lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and which of these could be applied to prevent the emergence and spread of new emerging diseases with pandemic potential. The Committee is also seeking to examine the UK's biosecurity framework and involvement in international biosecurity initiatives.

**Closes: 31 March 2023**

### **Insect decline and UK food security**

The House of Commons Science and Technology committee aims to build understanding of the role of insects in the UK food system and the economic impact of their decline and the associated risk to UK food security. It seeks to examine the evidence base for insect abundance in the UK, current drivers of insect loss and the Government's interventions to halt or reverse declines.

**Closes: 28 April 2023**

### **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

### [Applying for Chartered Biologist Status: Workshop](#)

24 April 2023

10:00 – 12:15

Online

Learn about the benefits of Chartered status and how to apply. The session will include a comprehensive overview of completing the CBiol competencies, and explain the assessment process and timeline. This [workshop](#) is running as a pilot, free and exclusive to RSB members.

### [Launch of "Changing the Story for Black Biomedical Scientists" Conference](#)

26 April 2023

12:00 – 18:00

University of West London, London, W5 5RF

This conference is designed to support aspiring Black biomedical undergraduate scientists to progress in academia and help increase the pool of Black scientists at every level. This conference is for undergraduate biosciences students but is also open to aspiring Black bioscience secondary school children.

## And finally...

### ['Terminator zones' on distant planets could harbor life](#)

These in-between regions could be prime sites for liquid water, reports Science Daily news.

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