

From: Science Policy Newsletter <science.policy@rsb.org.uk>
Sent: 19 January 2024 15:38
To: bstpsecretariat@gmail.com
Subject: RSB Science Policy Newsletter 19 January 2024



Science Policy Newsletter

a weekly round-up of policy headlines and stories

19 January 2024

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

[Warning of further measles outbreaks as cases rise](#)

Health officials have warned of further measles outbreaks across England after cases in the West Midlands rose by more than 30% in less than a week, reports BBC News.

[Importance of vaccination stressed, as Cardiff measles outbreak ends](#)

Public Health Wales is urging parents to ensure that their children complete their full course of MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccines, as it confirms that the measles outbreak in Cardiff announced in November 2023 has now concluded.

Royal Society of Biology news

[RSB biosecurity concerns raised in House of Lords debate](#)

The Society was pleased to hear its recommendations regarding infectious disease threats to UK biosecurity, including human, animal and plant health, raised as part of a House of Lords debate on 18th January.

Health and biomedicine

Covid jab skipped by 44%, entire UK study finds

BBC News reports that more than 7,000 Covid-related hospital admissions could have been prevented in the UK in the summer of 2022 if the population had received the full number of jabs recommended, according to research in The Lancet.

'Mini-placentas' help scientists understand the causes of pre-eclampsia and pregnancy disorders

The University of Cambridge has announced that scientists have grown 'mini-placentas' in the lab to shed light on how the placenta develops and interacts with the inner lining of the womb. These findings could help better understand and, in future, potentially treat pre-eclampsia.

New species of bacteria discovered in unusual human infection

Researchers at King's College London and Guy's & St Thomas NHS Trust have discovered a new species of bacteria, named *Variovorax durovernensis*, as a source of a patient's blood infection.

Food and drink

More evidence to ban energy drinks for children, study finds

BBC News highlights a review stating that the sale of all energy drinks to young people and children in the UK should be banned because of the latest evidence on their effects on health.

No 'real evidence' for labelling burden on Scottish businesses

According to this Scottish government press release, Scotland's Rural Affairs Secretary does not support 'Not for EU' food labelling proposals from the UK Government.

Agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries

Measures from 1 February to help eradicate bovine TB

The Welsh government will introduce measures from 1 February to tackle bovine tuberculosis (TB) in Wales, Rural Affairs Minister Lesley Griffiths has said.

The future of fertiliser use

This parliamentary POSTnote summarises the environmental and economic concerns arising from fertiliser use and the mitigation opportunities via diversification and innovation.

Supermarkets agree to accept smaller veg from rain-soaked UK farms

Supermarkets are agreeing to accept smaller than usual cauliflowers, sprouts, cabbages and leeks as farmers struggle to cope with poor weather and flooding around the UK, writes the Guardian.

Environment and ecology

Butterflies could lose spots as climate warms

New research from the University of Exeter shows that female Meadow Brown butterflies have fewer spots if they develop in warmer weather – so climate change could make them less spotty.

Researchers develop hedgehog safety test for robotic lawnmowers

Researchers led by the University of Oxford have developed a new test to assess how dangerous robotic lawnmowers are to hedgehogs. They hope this will lead to a certification scheme that will allow consumers to choose 'hedgehog-friendly' mowers.

Can foreign coral save a dying reef? Radical idea sparks debate

Devastation brought on by climate change and other threats prompts a last-resort proposal to rescue Caribbean corals, says Nature News.

Water and air

Freshwater habitat restoration

This parliamentary briefing outlines the evidence relating to the restoration of freshwater habitats in the UK and the key challenges to delivering this.

Flood resilience eroded by poorly maintained defences with Government in the dark on progress

In a recently published report, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) warns that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has no overall numerical target for the UK's level of long-term flood resilience, and so cannot know if it is progressing in its 2020 ambition to create "a nation more resilient to future flood and coastal erosion risk".

Climate and energy

Oceans break heat records five years in a row

According to Nature News, the heat stored in the world's oceans increased by the greatest margin ever in 2023.

Leicestershire battery storage site scheme given approval

A battery site capable of storing enough energy to provide two hours of power to 235,000 homes has been approved by planners, says BBC News.

Animal Research

Cloned rhesus monkey lives to adulthood for first time

A method that provides cloned embryos with a healthy placenta could pave the way for more research involving the primates, writes Nature News.

Research funding and higher education policy

£156m to expand excellent research units in English universities

Research England is investing £156 million to support 18 universities across England to expand their small, but outstanding research units.

Funding to boost advances in environmental monitoring solutions

Innovate UK and the Department for Environment Food Rural Affairs' (Defra) will invest up to £5

million for collaborative projects that develop environmental monitoring solutions to enable improved monitoring of environmental variables.

New admissions tests for 2024

The University of Cambridge and Imperial College London are to launch a new joint venture to deliver admissions tests for science, engineering and mathematics based degree courses.

Open access and publication policy

Society Publishers Respond to Plan S “Towards Responsible Publishing” Proposal

In The Scholarly Kitchen, three global society publishers, Institute of Physics (IOP) Publishing, American Institute of Physics (AIP) Publishing, and the American Physical Society (APS) have come together to offer a response to cOAlition S’s recent proposal.

Digital technologies

WHO releases AI ethics and governance guidance for large multi-modal models

The World Health Organization (WHO) has released new guidance on the ethics and governance of large multi-modal models (LMMs) – a type of fast growing generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology with applications across health care.

Accelerating how new drugs are made with machine learning

Researchers from the University of Cambridge have developed a platform that combines automated experiments with AI to predict how chemicals will react with one another, which could accelerate the design process for new drugs.

Using deep learning to improve rapid cellular imaging

Researchers from Imperial College London and University College London (UCL) have combined neural networks with a wide range of microscopy techniques to improve how scientists peer into cells.

AI discovers that not every fingerprint is unique

Engineers at Columbia University have built a new AI that shatters a long-held belief in forensics – that fingerprints from different fingers of the same person are unique. It turns out they are similar, only we’ve been comparing fingerprints the wrong way, writes Science Daily.

International news

Ultrasensitive tools ‘detect asymptomatic malaria’

Researchers in the USA and Uganda have developed tools that can detect the slightest traces of malaria in people who harbour the disease but do not show signs of sickness, reports SciDev.Net.

Landmark class action seeks to determine if glyphosate is cancer-causing, but how important is it in Australia?

An Australian court is set to determine if glyphosate can cause cancer in a landmark lawsuit involving more than 800 people, writes ABC News.

[EPA scraps plan to end mammal testing by 2035](#)

According to Science, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has abandoned a controversial plan to phase out all use of mammals to test the safety of chemicals by 2035.

Other

[Scientists fear tough UK immigration rules will deter talent](#)

In this Nature News article, scientists warn that cost increases and restrictions on visa-holders bringing family members will put off researchers.

People

[Dr Yiliang Ding honoured with prestigious Blavatnik award](#)

The pioneering research of Dr Yiliang Ding investigating the structure and function of RNA in living cells at the John Innes Centre has been recognised with a major award.

[Timothy Riley is appointed Food Standards Agency Deputy Chair](#)

The Secretary of State for Health has announced the appointment of Timothy Riley as Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency. His appointment begins on 1 January 2024 for three years.

Committee vacancies

[Teaching Policy Advisory Group member recruitment](#)

Expressions of interest for TPAG members will open formally via mySociety in February 2024. If you would like to be notified when the application process for TPAG members opens, please email shabana.brightley@rsb.org.uk.

Opportunities

[RSB School Biology Teacher of the Year Award](#)

Do you know an amazing school biology teacher? Teachers, school staff or students, their parents and guardians can now [suggest a teacher](#) for the Royal Society of Biology's School Biology Teacher of the Year Award. Visit the Society's [website](#) for further information. Teachers working in the UK can now also contact Dr Amanda Hardy to discuss ideas and to [suggest a teacher](#) to nominate themselves or a colleague **by 24th January 2024**. If you know a school biology teacher who deserves recognition for their passion and ideas, please encourage them to submit an application this year.

[Royal Society of Biology travel grants](#)

AMRSB and early-career MRSB members of the Royal Society of Biology can now apply for a [travel grant](#) of up to £1,000 to support future travel in connection with biological study, teaching or research. Learn new lab and field techniques, gain professional development skills, and network with academics with the support of a travel grant. [Visit the website](#) for further

information and to read reports from [previous grant recipients](#). The deadline for applications is **Friday 26th January 2024**.

Consultations

[Towards Responsible Publishing](#)

cOAlition S is seeking input from the research community to establish a community-based scholarly communication system. The consultation process will run from November 2023 **until April 2024**.

[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

[Plant Health Series: How to communicate science, win friends and influence people](#)

2 February 2024

14:00 – 15:00

Online (Zoom)

Renowned author, plant enthusiast and media professional Professor Jonathan Drori will provide the ground rules for effective science communication. He will address how to define, understand and engage with different audiences and how to widen your influence beyond your usual networks. Guided by Jon's personal experience, attendees will also learn of common misconceptions in plant biology and the fallacy of 'the general public'. The talk will be followed by an opportunity for an audience Q&A and discussion, chaired by Dr Mimi Tanimoto, communications and engagement consultant.

[Good ideas that made it into start-up companies](#)

7 February 2024

16:30 – 18:30

Biosciences Atrium, Department of Biosciences, Durham University, DH1 3LE

Professor Carrie Ambler and **Professor David Weinkove** are two cell biologists from Durham University, who collaborated with physical scientists to develop spin-out companies, [LightOx](#) and [Magnitude Biosciences](#). Both speakers will describe their experiences in moving from academia into the world of biotech business, as well as the challenges and opportunities they have faced. There will be a chance for questions and informal discussion after the talks. This event will be useful to anyone interested in finding out how academic research can be translated into directly useful products.

[Medical Technology Innovation Facility \(MTIF\) visit & tours](#)

22 February 2024

14:00 – 16:45

Clifton Campus, Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Ln, Clifton, Nottingham, NG11 8NS

The **Medical Technology Innovation Facility (MTIF)** at Nottingham Trent University, opened in April 2020 with a view to 'progress medical technology from bench to bedside'. The site includes laboratories, clean-rooms, and an extensive range of specialist equipment to help key industry players both enhance and accelerate their research and development. Take a behind the scenes look at a specialist medical technology innovation facility, and hear from senior microbiologist **Dr Samantha McLean** MRSB.

Visit to the Scottish Fisheries Museum

24 February 2024

11:00 – 14:00

Scottish Fisheries Museum, St Ayles, Harbourhead, Anstruther, Fife KY10 3AB

Discover the history of the Scottish fishing industry on this guided tour of the **Scottish Fisheries Museum**. This will include the opportunity to go onboard **the Reaper**, a Fife sailing herring drifter and part of the National Historic Fleet. As this tour will include sections outside and onboard the Reaper vessel, we recommend all attendees wear warm, wind-proof clothes that are suitable for the weather. Organisers will assess the weather forecast 5 days in advance to check for unfavourable conditions.

Bioscience Careers Day 2024

5 March 2024 - 7 March 2024

12:00 – 14:05 each day

Online (Zoom)

Find out about the variety of careers open to bioscience students at this year's online Royal Society of Biology **Bioscience Careers Day (BCD)**. This year the BCD will take place over three days from Tuesday 5th March to Thursday 7th March. Each day will comprise of expert talks, Q&A's and skills workshops designed to enhance your knowledge of the variety of careers available to bioscience graduates. There will also be opportunities to chat with bioscience professionals and other students from across the UK.

And finally...

Kew Gardens names mysterious plants and fungi new to science

From an underground "forest" to spectacular orchids, scientists at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, discovered 74 new plants and 15 fungi last year, reports BBC news.



[Privacy Centre](#) [Unsubscribe](#) [mySociety](#) [Website](#) [myLearning](#)

Royal Society of Biology

Science Policy Team

1 Naorji Street

London

WC1X 0GB

science.policy@rsb.org.uk

Please note: 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.

© Royal Society of Biology 2024
1 Naorji Street, London, WC1X 0GB
Registered Charity No. 277981