

SPOTTED

Brexit break-ups; little impact; micro medicine

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15 JULY 2016

WEEK OF JULY 11TH

Brexit break-ups

Leaders of research projects funded by the European Union have asked some scientists in the United Kingdom to **stop participating in**, or at least running, studies that involve EU research partners, *The Guardian* reported Monday.

The pressure to abandon these collaborations is a response to the U.K.'s recent vote to exit the EU, known as 'Brexit.' Staff at some elite U.K. universities also have asked their researchers to leave similar collaborations.

Administrators fear that the financial fallout from Brexit could put U.K.-EU collaborations at risk. For example, one EU project manager worries that U.K. researchers might fail to live up to their financial obligations to a consortium, according to the newspaper.

U.K. politicians incorrectly assume that cross-Channel collaborations can continue until Brexit negotiations are completed, Joe Gorman, a senior scientist at Sintef, a research institute in Norway, told *The Guardian*. "They are wrong, the problems start right now," he said.

SOURCES:

The Guardian / 11 Jul 2016

UK scientists dropped from EU projects because of post-Brexit funding fears

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/jul/12/uk-scientists-dropped-from-eu-projects-because-of-post-brexit-funding-fears>

Little impact

Websites for journals published by the American Society for Microbiology **will no longer list the publications' 'impact factor,'** a measure of a journal's academic importance based on the average number of times papers in that journal are cited, according to an editorial published Monday.

But one or two extremely popular papers can greatly skew the measure, critics say. And researchers tend to use a journal's impact factor to judge its papers even though the measure is not tied to particular pieces of research.

The announcement is just the latest blow to the impact factor. Senior employees at several academic presses published a preprint last week that **underscores the fallacy** of judging studies by impact factor, calling the measure a "poor indicator of the quality of individual papers."

A more accurate gauge of a journal's academic standing would graph the number of citations for each paper in a journal across a specified period of time, according to the preprint's authors.

The Royal Society and EMBO Press **already have embraced this approach**, *Nature* reported.

SOURCES:

mSystems / 11 Jul 2016

ASM journals eliminate impact factor information from journal websites

<http://msystems.asm.org/content/1/4/e00088-16>**Nature** / 08 Jul 2016

Beat it, impact factor! Publishing elite turns against controversial metric

<http://www.nature.com/news/beat-it-impact-factor-publishing-elite-turns-against-controversial-metric-1.20224>

Welcome, journal

Scientists are also **debating the potential impact** of a new open-access online journal, suggests a story in *STAT*.

The journal, called *Wellcome Open Research*, joins the **growing field of innovative publications** for biomedical research that includes **bioRxiv** and **eLife**, according to a news report in *Science*.

Any of the thousands of scientists backed by the Wellcome Trust, a London-based \$24 billion charity, **can submit papers, or simply data**, to the journal. Unlike bioRxiv, the journal is peer-reviewed, but the process occurs after publication and is totally transparent.

The trust will cover all publication fees for authors and will not charge for access. But it's unclear if

enough incentives exist for scientists to post their manuscripts to the site.

SOURCES:

STAT / 07 Jul 2016

A new e-journal could be a 'game-changer.' But will scientists come?

<https://www.statnews.com/2016/07/07/wellcome-trust-preprint/Science> / 05 Jul 2016

U.K. research charity will self-publish results from its grantees

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/07/uk-research-charity-will-self-publish-results-its-grantees>

Micro medicine

Newly identified small pieces of RNA could **serve as a therapy** for a type of spinocerebellar ataxia (SCA), a group of inherited neurodegenerative diseases, suggests a mouse study published Wednesday in *Science Translational Medicine*.

SCAs cause loss of motor coordination and involve changes to the cerebellum, a brain area also involved in some of the core symptoms of autism.

When researchers injected a virus carrying certain RNA snippets into a mouse model of the condition, these '**microRNAs**' put the brakes on production of a protein linked to features of SCA, such as a degradation of motor skills and of neurons in the cerebellum, reported **Christopher M. Gomez** of the University of Chicago. The treatment also reduced these features in the rodents.

The gene for the problematic protein also serves as a template for a component of a vital calcium channel (a channel that controls the flow of calcium ions in and out of cells). The microRNA treatment silences the SCA-associated protein but leaves the calcium channel intact.

SOURCES:

Science Translational Medicine / 13 Jul 2016

microRNA therapy protects against neurodegenerative disorder

<http://stm.sciencemag.org/content/8/347/347ra94>

Tenure troubles

Some 400 people **apply for every opening** for an assistant professor in the engineering school at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology, according to an article published Thursday in *The New York Times*.

The job crunch in science is growing as more Ph.D.s graduate and universities cut back on tenure-track jobs. Researchers have borrowed a measure called 'Ro,' often used in demography, to quantify the mounting problem.

In this case, Ro indicates the average number of successful graduate students that a tenure-track professor mentors over the course of his or her career. A higher Ro for a field indicates a rockier road to employment. Environmental engineering tops the charts with a Ro of 19. Biomedicine's Ro comes in at 6.3, which means that for every new Ph.D. who lands a tenure-track job, another 5.3 will have to find an alternative.

Mentors in the sciences should have sobering conversations with undergraduates to prepare them for the challenges of getting a job, **P. Kay Lund**, director of the division of biomedical research workers at the National Institutes of Health, told the newspaper.

SOURCES:

The New York Times / 14 Jul 2016

So many research scientists, so few openings as professors

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/upshot/so-many-research-scientists-so-few-openings-as-professors.html?_r=0

Job moves

Making a career change? Send your news to jobmoves@spectrumnews.org.
