

[News story: Professor Melanie Welham selected for the role of Executive Chair of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council](#)

Professor Melanie Welham is currently interim Chief Executive of BBSRC having previously served as Executive Director, Science for BBSRC. Prior to this, Professor Welham worked at the University of Bath as Professor of Molecular Signalling and was the first woman to be appointed a professor in her department. Melanie is a leading researcher in molecular signalling and stem cell science.

UKRI will be the main mechanism to promote the UK's unrivalled strengths in research and innovation both at home and around the world. It is at the heart of our modern Industrial Strategy and will ensure that we continue to make the most of our world-leading R&D sector and provide support for our researchers and scientists.

Professor Welham said:

The excellent research, people and infrastructure that BBSRC invests in makes a real difference to how we understand the world around us.

Creatively exploring the frontiers of bioscience yields remarkable insights into how life works and will, in turn, improve our lives; giving us secure and nutritious food, renewable resources, and better health for us and our animals.

I'm delighted to have the opportunity to continue to lead BBSRC in UK Research and Innovation – to work in partnership to keep the UK at the global forefront of research and innovation.

Sir Mark Walport, UKRI CEO Designate, said:

I'm delighted with the appointment of Melanie as the first BBSRC Executive Chair. She has an excellent track record as a research leader and as interim BBSRC Chief Executive since 2016. Melanie has played a central role in developing and delivering the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund and I look forward to continuing to work closely with her as we now embark on establishing UK Research and Innovation.

The post of BBSRC Executive Chair is potentially subject to a pre-appointment

hearing by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. The Committee will consider this in due course.

[Press release: Invasive species week: Floating pennywort a spreading menace](#)

Minister Geoffrey Boot MHK Isle of Man, Hannah Blythyn AM Wales, Minister Denis Naughten TD Ireland, Lord Gardiner, UK Biosecurity Minister and Deputy Steve Luce, Jersey.

Reports of floating pennywort in our rivers and lakes have reached a record high with 50 tonnes of the invasive plant being removed from the River Thames by the Environment Agency in 2017.

Fast-growing plants like floating pennywort can spread into the wild if they are not properly disposed of when removed from garden ponds ponds. The [Be Plant Wise](#) campaign has handy tips for gardeners on how to prevent this from happening.

Lord Gardiner, the Biosecurity Minister, will see the effects of floating pennywort on Little Britain lake, Hillingdon, and hear about the work being carried out to prevent this plant from spreading further in the River Colne on Monday, 26 March 2018.

He will also see new signs being put up to encourage fishermen and boaters to [Check, Clean, Dry](#) their equipment and clothing to avoid spreading invasive species.

Biosecurity Minister, Lord Gardiner said:

Invasive species pose a real threat to our country's native plants and animals and cost the economy at least £1.8 billion a year.

The Check, Clean, Dry campaign is playing a key role in raising awareness of these threats – helping to prevent new arrivals and stopping the spread of invasive species already here. It is great to see the whole community of river users supporting this programme to protect the future of our precious native species.

As well as following the Check, Clean, Dry advice, people can help by reporting sightings of invasive plants through the [PlantTracker app](#).

Lord Gardiner's visit comes as part of a wider push by government to promote Invasive Species Week. The week is an annual awareness-raising campaign organised by the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) and Defra to get members of the public thinking about simple steps they can take to stop the spread of invasive species which threaten Britain's plants and animals.

Find out more on [non-native species](#).

Below are the themes for Invasive Species Week, which runs until 29 March 2018.

- Monday 26 March – Ornamental plants. [Be Plant Wise](#) and raising awareness of invasive plants.
- Tuesday 27 March – Hitchhikers. Information on the ways that recreational water users, field workers and anyone out in the countryside can help to prevent the spread of INNS, in particular promoting [Check Clean Dry](#).
- Wednesday 28 March – Exotic pets. Owners are asked to make sure they never release pets, or allow them to escape, into the wild.
- Thursday 29 March – #getINNSvolved – on the last day of Invasive Species Week tell us how you are getting #getINNSvolved.

[Statement to Parliament: Motoring agency business plans for 2018 to 2019](#)

I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2018-19 business plans for the Department for Transport's Motoring Agencies:

The business plans set out:

1. the services each agency will deliver and any significant changes they plan to make
2. the resources they require
3. the key performance indicators, by which their performance will be assessed

These plans allow service users and members of the public to assess how the agencies are performing in operating their key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plans will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

[News story: Hepatitis C in the North West report released](#)

Public Health England (PHE) [North West's hepatitis C: 2016 report](#), published today (Monday 26 March 2018), reveals that the number of people infected with hepatitis C has remained stable since 2014. The most recent estimates suggest at least 40,000 people across the North West acquired hepatitis C infection, and of those 27,000 have developed chronic infection.

The report also shows that the number of infected people who have not been diagnosed remains high with an estimated 16,000 out of 40,000 (40%). Many people may be unaware because they have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, but they could be at risk of liver damage as well as passing on the infection to others.

Data shows that the highest burden of disease is in the Greater Manchester area, while Lancashire and Liverpool also have high numbers of people living with hepatitis C.

Those most at risk of contracting hepatitis C infection in the North West are people who inject drugs or have injected drugs in the past – especially if they have shared injecting equipment. They are at increased risk even if they injected only once or twice in the past.

A nationwide survey carried out in 2013 revealed that, in the North West, up to 68% of individuals who inject drugs have hepatitis C infection. People in prison settings also have an increased risk of hepatitis C infection,

Evdokia Dardamissis from PHE North West said:

Hepatitis C remains a major public health concern and one that we are actively addressing in partnership with the NHS and drug services.

The rate of hepatitis C-related mortality and hospital admissions for hepatitis C-related end stage liver disease in the North West is almost twice as high as the rate in England.

However, we are committed to working closely with multiple stakeholders to improve surveillance, diagnosis and care pathways. By increasing public awareness, those people most at risk can take the necessary preventative measures to protect themselves, and

those who are already infected can be brought into highly effective treatment programmes.

We encourage anyone who believes that they may be at risk to ask their GP or drug services to be tested for the virus. This is an infection which can be cured in most people. Simple measures such as using sterile injecting equipment and not sharing personal items like toothbrushes and razors will minimise chances of being exposed to hepatitis C.

Statement to Parliament: Maritime and Coastguard Agency business plan 2018 to 2019

I am proud to announce the publication of the [Maritime and Coastguard Agency's \(MCA\) business plan for 2018 to 2019](#). MCA does vital work to save lives at sea, regulate ship standards and protect the marine environment. The Agency affects not just those working on the coast or at sea, it upholds the legacy of our great maritime nation.

The business plan sets out:

1. the services that the agency will deliver and any significant changes it plans to make
2. the resources the agency requires
3. the key performance indicators, by which its performance will be assessed

This plan allows service users and members of the public to assess how the agency is performing in operating its key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plan will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both houses.