

# SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

## FUNDING

### Cap on grants

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, will limit the amount of funding that scientists supported by the agency can hold at any one time. The policy, announced on 2 May, is intended to make it easier for early- and mid-career scientists to obtain NIH grants. The agency said it will not set a hard limit on the number of grants or the amount of funding that individual researchers can receive. Instead, it will introduce a grant-support index that assigns a point value to each type of grant on the basis of its complexity and size. Currently, just 10% of grant recipients win more than 40% of the NIH's research money. See page 142 for more.

## PEOPLE

### Mixed societies

A total of 36 women were inducted last week into the leading scientific societies of the United States and the United Kingdom. On 2 May, the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) announced 84 new members, 23 of whom (27%) are women. And on 5 May, the Royal Society, Britain's oldest and most prestigious scientific society, named 13 women (26%) in its 2017 class of 50 fellows. In addition, NAS president Marcia McNutt, a geophysicist, was made a foreign member of the Royal Society.

### New shores

David Lipman is stepping down as director of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) in Bethesda, Maryland, the institute announced on 3 May. Lipman, who has directed the NCBI



JEFF J. MITCHELL/GETTY

## Pro-Europe win raises scientists' hopes

Researchers in France reacted with relief and optimism to Emmanuel Macron's sweeping victory in the country's presidential elections on 7 May. Macron decisively defeated his far-right opponent Marine Le Pen, the leader of the Front National party, who had threatened

to take France out of the European Union. The pro-European president-elect promised in his campaign to save France's research and higher-education budgets from cuts and to launch a science-driven innovation programme to create jobs. See [go.nature.com/2pfgbke](http://go.nature.com/2pfgbke) for more.

since its creation in 1988, was responsible for launching the literature database PubMed and the DNA-sequence repository GenBank, along with other public bioinformatics databases. Lipman will now serve as chief science officer at a private food-science company, Impossible Foods in Redwood City, California.

## POLICY

### Call for diversity

Canadian universities must develop plans to diversify the composition of some of their most prestigious posts, according to a requirement announced on 4 May by a trio of science-funding agencies. The new rule applies to the Can\$265-million

(US\$194-million) Canada Research Chairs Program, which funds an estimated 1,600 professorships at Canadian higher-education institutions. By December, universities with five or more research chairs must present a plan to increase the representation of women, indigenous peoples and other minority groups, as well as people with disabilities. Progress reports are required annually, and the agencies warned that failure to fulfil the requirements could result in the withholding of funds.

### Advisers axed

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has dismissed at least five academic researchers from a scientific advisory board. The

scientists were notified on 5 May that their appointments to the 18-member Board of Scientific Counselors had expired and would not be renewed, according to media reports. An EPA official said the agency would consider replacing them with representatives from EPA-regulated industries. The US House of Representatives has also passed a Republican-sponsored bill to restructure another EPA advisory board; critics say the legislation would make it easier for industry representatives to serve.

### Nazi review

Germany's Max Planck Society has launched a €1.5-million (US\$1.6-million), three-year study to discover as much as possible about the

victims of Nazi euthanasia programmes whose brains were acquired by scientists for neuroscience research. Around 200,000 physically or mentally disabled people were murdered during the programmes. On 2 May, the society named a four-member international team that will try to identify those victims whose remains are still in Max Planck institutes and those who were interred in a special ceremony in 1990. The team will also try to reconstruct exactly what happened to the brain preparations, and how they may have been used in research and research publications.

## PUBLISHING

**Failed deal**

Dutch universities have failed to reach a new agreement with Oxford University Press (OUP) over access to the publisher's academic journals. On 1 May, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands, which led the negotiations, said that the country's research universities were unable to agree to the British publisher's latest licensing proposal, because it did not include an offer for affordable open access to research articles in OUP journals. The Netherlands aims to make the results of all publicly funded science freely accessible by 2020.



## EVENTS

**Secret mission**

After nearly 718 days in space, the US Air Force's unmanned X-37B spaceplane (pictured) landed at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida on 7 May. The reusable plane, which looks like a miniature space shuttle, was on an unspecified mission to carry out experiments in orbit. It was the fourth and longest flight yet for the military programme, and the first to land in Florida rather than at an Air Force base in California.

**DIY memo**

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) in Stockholm has called on European Union member states to review their procedures for authorizing do-it-yourself gene-engineering kits produced in the United States. The kits, which are intended to contain

a harmless strain of the common laboratory bacterium *Escherichia coli*, use CRISPR precision-editing technologies and are targeted at citizen scientists. The move followed the discovery in March by German authorities that some kits had been contaminated with pathogenic bacteria, including some multidrug-resistant strains. Germany has since banned their import. The ECDC's assessment report concluded that the risk of infection to users is low.

**Dead flowers**

A paperwork blunder has led to the accidental destruction of a valuable botanical reference collection, according to media reports. In March, biosecurity officers with the Australian quarantine authorities destroyed allegedly mislabelled samples of rare nineteenth-century daisies, which the French National Museum of Natural History in Paris had sent on loan

## COMING UP

**15–16 MAY**

A Royal Society meeting in Newport Pagnell, UK, addresses how long-term climate change has affected marine palaeolandscapes. [go.nature.com/2qryd9n](http://go.nature.com/2qryd9n)

**15–19 MAY**

The International Conference on Precision Physics and Fundamental Physical Constants takes place in Warsaw. [ffk2017.fuw.edu.pl](http://ffk2017.fuw.edu.pl)

to Brisbane. Australian authorities have asked for a review of the incident, the BBC reports.

## EDUCATION

**Irrational doctrine**

Serbia's evolutionary society has expressed concern over a renewed attack on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by some 170 Serbian academics, including engineers, physicians, artists, philosophers, journalists, teachers and clergy. On 3 May, the group signed a petition to include the teaching of creationist theory in schools and universities. The academics also claim in a letter to the education and science ministry, the parliament, Serbia's Academy of Sciences and Arts and its leading universities that Darwin's "dogmatic" theory lacks scientific confirmation. In response, scientists with the evolutionary society said that the signatories and their creationist reasoning lack understanding of simple biology. In 2004, the Serbian education ministry had attempted in vain to ban evolutionary theory from school curricula.

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## TREND WATCH

Charitable donations to British universities surpassed the £1-billion (US\$1.3-billion) milestone for the first time last year. The 110 universities that took part in the latest Ross–CASE survey of charitable giving secured a total of £1.06 billion in philanthropic income in the academic year 2015–16. Donations were up 23% on the previous year and have almost tripled over the past 12 years. Fifty-five per cent of this income came from organizations, and 45% from individual donors.

## GENEROUS DONATIONS

The philanthropic income of UK universities has reached a record level.

