

ISSTI

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE
STUDY OF SCIENCE
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
www.issti.ed.ac.uk

Newsletter

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In this issue of the ISSTI Newsletter, we celebrate major funding successes, writing honours, and international collaborations across our community. Highlights include new projects on health AI, synthetic biology and open research. We also share recent research engagement activities with various publics and warmly welcome new members to our vibrant community.

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ARIA Project “Cultivating Responsible Innovation for Plant Synthetic Genomics Through Experimental Governance”

Award: c. £1.8m; PI: Robert Smith, University of Edinburgh.

Team: Joana Formosinho, University of Edinburgh; Sarah Hartley, University of Exeter; Adrian Ely, University of Sussex; Cecilie Hilmer, University of Sussex; Sophia McCully, Nuffield Council on Bioethics; Sandra Knapp, Natural History Museum; and Alex Davey, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Rob and his interdisciplinary team (pictured below) will explore the social, ethical, and ecological dimensions of plant synthetic biology by engaging farmers, growers, plant biologists, and the wider public. They’ll generate discussion using commissioned artistic works, such as a short documentary, photography series, and biological art installation, and hosting public events across the UK. This work will also involve exploring key governance considerations, developing and testing new decision-making approaches, and translating learnings into resources that others can use. Closely integrated with this programme’s technical projects (Design, Build, Deliver), Rob’s team aims to equip the next generation of researchers with the skills and connections to think in new ways about why advanced genetic work in plants is worth doing, who might benefit from it, and who should be making decisions about it.



Robert Smith



Joana Formosinho



Sarah Hartley



Adrian Ely



Cecilie Hilmer



Sophia McCully



Sandra Knapp



Alex Davey



Evidence-Informed Policymaking Grant “A Critical Analysis of Inclusive Evidence-Informed Mental Health Policymaking in Africa”

Martyn Pickersgill, Co-Head of the Centre for Biomedicine, Self and Society (CBSS) in the School of Population Health Sciences, is Co-I on a new British Academy-funded project examining how social scientific and experiential evidence informs mental health policy across five African countries. The project brings together a multidisciplinary team of researchers from institutions across the continent. Using a mixed methods approach, the team will engage with mental health policymakers, researchers, and People with Lived Experience of mental ill-health to develop context-specific strategies to better integrate evidence into mental health policy formulation and implementation.

InFrame Project “Working-Class in the Class and Boardroom: Sharing First-Generation Staff Experiences and Creating Opportunities for Mutual Learning and Support (FirstGen)”

Led by Niki Vermeulen (PI), with Mark Cassidy, Bill Jenkins, Mark Winskel, Sabine Hoffman, Pippa Goldschmidt, Isabel Fletcher and Anna Pilz.

This project focusses on a hidden aspect of research cultures and their improvement: first-generation staff and the intersection between academic work, careers and class. This is a neglected element in EDI discussions, though research shows that educational and social backgrounds shape academic trajectories and expectations. Initial conversations revealed how talking about experiences can raise insecurities and shame, leading to concealment. How do first-generation staff experiences intersect with research culture, and what leadership is required to give them greater visibility and a sense of belonging?

The project seeks to move from individualised accounts towards collective conversations. By highlighting common – epistemic, social and emotional – dimensions, the aim is to create shared understandings and support career development and collegiality. In the InFrame context, attention is given to leadership and how first-generation academics may provide different leadership, beyond leading by example, creating inclusive environments.

InFrame Project “Transforming Research: The Effects of Sharing Facilities on Cultures and Outcomes”

Led by Anne Kerr and colleagues in Glasgow, with Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Mark Cassidy and Niki Vermeulen in the Edinburgh team.

Universities are establishing shared space and equipment to foster collaboration, reduce energy consumption and duplication of resources, and accommodate a growing number of staff in a finite estate. This project will explore what sharing means for research cultures and outcomes, focusing on collaboration between disciplines and with other sectors and publics.

The research investigates the benefits and drawbacks of shared facilities, the norms, values and forms of knowledge they enable or weaken, and practical steps to derive further benefits for research cultures and outputs. Methods include documentary analysis, interviews, focus groups and observation in shared facilities at Edinburgh and Glasgow. Approaching research as a broad set of activities of knowledge production and dissemination, including less recognised labour of “sorting” and “cleaning,” the study will involve building users with diverse backgrounds. The analysis will also use institutional and public reports. Engagement with networks and literature on collaboration, innovation and public engagement will refine the design, reflect on findings and identify opportunities.

This is the Newsletter of the Institute for the Study of Science, Technology and Innovation (ISSTI). This interdisciplinary network, founded in 2001 by Robin Williams, brings together colleagues from across the University of Edinburgh studying science, technology and innovation, and is hosted by the Science, Technology and Innovation Studies (STIS) Subject Group. Find us on our website: www.issti.ed.ac.uk.

The Science, Technology and Innovation Studies (STIS) Subject Group at the University of Edinburgh is internationally recognised as a leading centre of research, teaching and knowledge exchange in this important interdisciplinary field. With more than 40 staff, STIS enjoys outstanding ratings for its scholarly publications and impact, sustains research intensity with a high volume of external research income, and excels in teaching through a suite of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and programmes. For more information, see our website: www.stis.ed.ac.uk.

ISSTI Newsletter Editorial Team: Huayu Xin (Editing), Robin Williams and Matjaz Vidmar (Supervision).

COARA Grant “Adoption by Example: Reflecting Open Research Progress to Guide Transformations in Assessment”

Led by Andrew Millar and his BioDRM team, including Alli Spring, with Niki Vermeulen as Co-I.

The University of Edinburgh (UoE) is renowned for expertise in Open Research (OR). Its data management policy and OR Roadmap emphasise sharing and reusability and encourage FAIR practices, supported by an award-winning library team. UoE also hosts experts in open, social and data sciences, including co-applicants from STIS and BioRDM. However, UoE’s assessment of researchers does not mention Open Research.

The project brings together this expertise to promote assessment of Open Research at individual and organisational levels. Open and FAIR sharing of outputs will be evaluated in at least three pilot projects, using a scalable, validated process. Results and implications will be discussed with researchers and managers, with input from the University of Leiden. Outcomes will be shared across UoE and through both formal and informal networks, highlighting leading institutes and researchers to help embed openness in research culture. A key aim is to influence evaluation by updating a field in the standardised promotions process. Agreement to update this component would provide a way to recognise Open and FAIR outputs, aligned with CoARA’s goals.

UKRI Metascience Project “Shaping Research Ecosystems: UKRI Funding and the UK Research Base in a Global Context”

Award: £178,000; Led by Rhodri Leng (PI), with George Richardson (Co-I) and Chris Edgar (data analyst) from Nesta’s Innovation Growth Lab.

This 1-year project, funded through the UKRI Metascience Sandpit, examines how UKRI funding shapes the UK research base in a global context. By allocating resources to specific fields and topics, UKRI can influence where capacity grows, how expertise concentrates, and which areas are sustained or decline. High concentration risks over-reliance and reduced adaptability, while excessive diversification may hinder critical mass. Understanding where UKRI sits on this spectrum, and how patterns evolve, is crucial for managing risk and opportunity.

The project will integrate UKRI funding records (including unfunded proposals) with OpenAlex bibliographic data to assess concentration and diversification since 2010. Analyses will compare UK and global trends and map UKRI investments to determine whether funding aligns with, leads, or lags behind emerging topics. Review panel scores will be analysed to evaluate whether reviewers favour well-established or growing areas, contributing to a “missed opportunities” analysis of unfunded proposals in fields that later expanded. Case studies will add qualitative depth, exploring how funding decisions connect to specific research topics.

Findings will provide UKRI with a structured way to assess how funding aligns with shifts in the research landscape, when investments support or lag behind trends, and how choices shape the capacity and direction of the research system. Outputs will include a report, policy briefings, a peer-reviewed article and open analysis scripts to enable wider application.

Writing Honours

Pippa Goldschmidt’s short story *Lord of the Fruit Flies* (originally commissioned for Radio 4) is included in this year’s *Best British Short Stories* anthology, published by Salt.

Her short story collection *Schrödinger’s Wife (and other possibilities)*, published by Gold SF/Goldsmiths last year, was shortlisted for this year’s British Science Fiction Awards.



International Workshop Shares Health AI Experiences

Health services worldwide have struggled to achieve the improvements in productivity and care promised by Artificial Intelligence. Building on their evaluation of the pathbreaking NHS England AI Lab, **Kathrin Cresswell and Robin Williams** ran an international workshop to share experience of attempts to deploy AI safely and effectively at pace and scale. A delegation from the Norwegian Health Service described innovative approaches they have been developing for AI procurement and for deployment at scale through platforms which provide a standardised interface for implementing AI models in radiology and other care processes. Discussions with the NHS England AI Lab team and also with their counterparts from NHS Scotland and NHS Wales highlighted common challenges and opportunities. The group highlighted the benefits of international dialogue and agreed to keep in touch to foster continued exchanges in this area.

Check the [new article](#) and [published report](#) on the outcomes of the Evaluation of the NHS AI Lab.



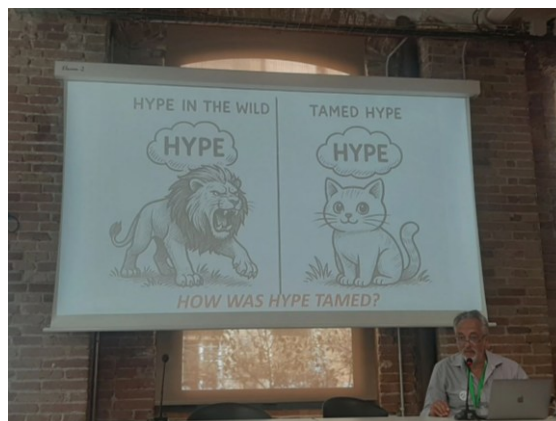
Nis Johannsen, Head of Digital Innovation, South-Eastern Regional Health Authority (Helse Sør-Øst RHF); **Bjørn Anton Graff**, Head of Research and Innovation, Clinic for Medical Diagnostics, Vestre Viken Health Trust; **Miguel Figueroa**, Senior Advisor, Enterprise Architecture, Sykehuspartner HF (public IT provider); **Hanna Høyem Aronsen**, Radiologist, Vestre Viken Health Trust.

Inaugural Hype Studies Conference in Barcelona and the Hype Studies International Network

From 10–12 September 2025, the first Hype Studies Conference took place at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) in Barcelona. Co-organised by ISSTI's **Vassilis Galanos**, the event brought together over 400 registered participants. Highlights included a keynote by Gemma Milne, a plenary panel with distinguished guests from academia and journalism, the presentation of **Robin Williams'** forthcoming book *After Hype: The Business of Taming the Digital Economy* (co-authored with **Neil Pollock** — see also his [recent article](#) on the book), and a party with guest DJs.

With 80 presentations across 20 panels, 15 workshops, artworks and short films, the conference celebrated interdisciplinarity: STS scholars, journalists, psychologists, designers, artists and engineers explored topics ranging from the music industry, computer games and AI to quantum technology, cyberlibertarianism and K-POP fandom. The atmosphere reflected curiosity, camaraderie and a sense of adventure—a testament to the growing field of Hype Studies and with strong representation from the wider ISSTI community.

Follow the work of the Hype Studies international network at: hypestudies.org.



New Grant for Outreach to Remote Communities

Matjaz Vidmar has won Institute of Physics (IoP) in Scotland's Outreach Grant for the latest of his "Space Activities on Tour" visits to remote communities. In July he visited Inner Hebrides and Barra and Vatersay, delivering public talks and community workshops about his work in better understanding the socio-technical dimensions of space infrastructure.

Matjaz has also recently been elected to the Executive Committee of the IoP's Higher Education Group, taking up his seat on 1st October. He is particularly looking forward to bring forward more interdisciplinary engagements between social and natural science students.



Researcher News

Indigenous Astronomy and International Dialogue

Jarita Holbrook took part in Oxford XIII "Indigenous Astronomy in the Space Age," the triennial meeting of the International Society for Archaeoastronomy and Astronomy in Culture (ISAAC), held in Melbourne in July and co-funded by the International Astronomical Union (IAU). The conference gathered 200 attendees from 30 countries, with the strongest Indigenous and First Nation representation to date. At the closing, Jarita handed the Presidency to Duane Hamacher while continuing as SOC lead for the IAU proceedings. Afterward, a group visited central Australia with Elder Vincent Forrester, who shared teachings on celestial traditions.



Digital Innovation and Public Engagement

Giulia De Togni presented on responsible digital innovation at the EGOS Colloquium in Athens and on imaginaries of care robots at the NAJS Conference in Reykjavik. She co-organised the *Reflections from the Field: Participation, Identity, Critique* workshop at AsSIST 2025 in Edinburgh with **Benedetta Catanzariti** and **Matjaz Vidmar**, and the JAWS-AJJ joint meeting in Hyogo. Public engagement included *Your Robot Friend* workshops at the Edinburgh Science Festival and a keynote at *Women in Computing*. Giulia has also taken up new roles for 2025–2030 as a member of the University Senate, the UK Young Academy and the Usher Institute Patient and Public Involvement Committee.

Critical Approaches to AI and Society

Vassilis Galanos contributed to debates on hype, AI and technology with a seminar at the Bristol Future Institute, a keynote at the CRISP Doctoral School in Stirling, and as a discussant at Edinburgh's Research Training Centre on AI in Social Science. He also gave a guest lecture at Anglia Ruskin University, a presentation on digital metaphors at an AI Ethics & Society event, and co-organised a "Critical Hype Studies" panel at STS Italia 2025. In collaboration with Maarten Hillebrandt, he announced a Call for Papers for *Information Polity*. Beyond academia, Vassilis published *Eleven Theses on Technological Hype as Capital*, co-organised the Queer Data Showcase, and was appointed Programme Director for the BA (Hons) Business Studies at the University of Stirling.

New ISSTI Members

Joana Formosinho works on the social dimensions of biology. She brings together biological and social knowledges and the arts to contribute to more sustainable multispecies societies. She is joining STIS as a research fellow on the Aria-funded project led by Rob Smith, on social and ethical dimensions of plant synthetic biology. She will work on interdisciplinary methods for bringing out the diversity of perspectives on plant synthetic biology; and engage diverse stakeholders in collaboration. (Headshot on page 2.)



Andrew Ivan Brown arrives in CBSS from the University of Washington, Seattle. He is taking on his new role as a Research Fellow on the ARIA-funded project, 'Neurology Navigates Neurotech (3N): Understanding the Experiences and Expectations of Neurology Clinicians in relation to the Promise of Precision Neurotechnology,' led by Martyn Pickersgill.

Andrew's interdisciplinary work intersects neuroethics, disability studies, and science and technology studies. His research topics include the ethics of implantable neurotechnology, such as brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) like Neuralink, and affirmative perspectives on ADHD that go beyond neurodiversity frameworks. In his previous postdoctoral role in the USA, he conducted 32 interviews with heads of neurotech labs, brain surgeons, neural engineers, and other researchers involved in clinical trials for BCIs in humans, as well as BCI participants and their caregivers.



Lucas Seuren joins the University of Edinburgh as a Research Fellow working with Kathrin Cresswell on the Horizon Europe-funded project, Gliomatch, investigating the implementation of a genomic precision medicine platform for brain cancer. He received his PhD in Linguistics at the University of Groningen, where he investigated how grammar is constructed in spoken language and social interaction.

His research experience includes investigating video consultations in the NHS at the University of Oxford, and their implementation in primary and long-term care in Ontario at the Institute for Better Health. His work combines qualitative interviews with close observation and recording of clinical practice to understand how technology shapes the ways in which patients and healthcare professionals interact. Lucas is currently particularly interested in the adoption of Generative AI tools and how they can be leveraged to augment, rather than erode, critical thinking and knowledge work.



Andrew Williams is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health in Social Sciences and one of the Co-Directors of the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP).

Andrew's research interests lie in the social and cultural determinants of health (the fifth wave of public health), especially among children and young people, particularly through the application and exploration of theories such as complexity theory and salutogenesis. His research is often collaborative and transdisciplinary, including engaged research (such as his work with the TR14ers) and co-production approaches.