

L@b Brief | September 2024

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COMMENT

Are we zipping up on the rails?

Hello again,



THE UK economy has made a sudden spurt and appears to be zipping up on the rails; overtaking many other members of the G7. The September forecast of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is quite different to the picture it painted in May when UK growth for 2024 was predicted to achieve only 0.4% - amid a slow recovery from last year's slight recession.

Now the OECD is saying that our economy will grow faster than that of Germany, Japan and Italy and has moved it to joint second place in the G7. At a time when the global outlook is improving, only the US is performing better.

UK growth is described as 'robust' and forecasts for 2024 have been upgraded to 1.1%, with a forecast of 1.2% for 2025. True, the UK will still have one of the highest interest rates in the OECD area, but other organisations are also rating our prospects highly.

Elsewhere predictions are being made about a sustained improvement in the strength of sterling. Unfortunately, freight costs are bucking the trend, with congestion in Asian ports caused by longer journeys needed to avoid trouble spots in the Middle East. Still good to make hay while the sun shines!

Toodle pip

Jacqueline

UK News

Rathburn Chemicals fined £40k for destruction of lab



RATHBURN CHEMICALS (Manufacturing), a solvents manufacturer, has been fined £40,000 for a blast which led to the destruction of a laboratory and caused considerable damage to nearby structures, underscoring the vital need for effective safety protocols in industrial settings.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) revealed that the explosion was likely to have been triggered by excessive pentane vapor generated during a distillation process. This vapor overheated and ignited due to a malfunction in the extraction system. Luckily, no injuries were reported, but the potential for severe consequences was significant. The explosion occurred around 6:45am, with witnesses reporting a massive fireball engulfing the factory and its laboratory and debris thrown into the air. As a precaution, local residents were evacuated, and a nearby primary school was closed.

The HSE's investigation found that Rathburn Chemicals had insufficient systems in place to manage steam and heat during distillation. The company also failed to identify signs of overheating that could lead to the ignition of flammable vapours.

HSE inspector Isabelle Martin commented, "This was a serious incident, and it is fortunate that no one was injured. The explosion could have been avoided if Rathburn Chemicals had followed proper control measures and safe working practices. The incident highlights the critical need for reliable safety measures and adequate training for employees handling flammable materials.

This month Rathburn Chemicals pleaded guilty to violations of Section 2(1) and Section 33(1)(a) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 at Selkirk Sheriff Court, and a £40,000 fine along with a £3,000 victim surcharge as a penalty for the 'avoidable explosion' was imposed.

By Bleona Lakaj

Key clients to join GAMBICA members at conference



WE ARE delighted to announce that Chris Neasham, associate director of procurement at global drugs company Almac Science is to be one of the keynote speakers at the GAMBICA lab industry conference in March 2025.

If you haven't heard of Almac, that's not really surprising, they keep a low profile, despite the fact that the last 5 years alone, Almac has contributed to over 50% of all FDA approved New Molecular Entities (NMEs) and currently supports 30% of EU approved /pre-registered Gene therapy products. The company employs over 7,500 highly skilled employees across 18 facilities in Europe, North America, and Asia which puts Chris in an ideal position to provide insights on what they want from their suppliers.

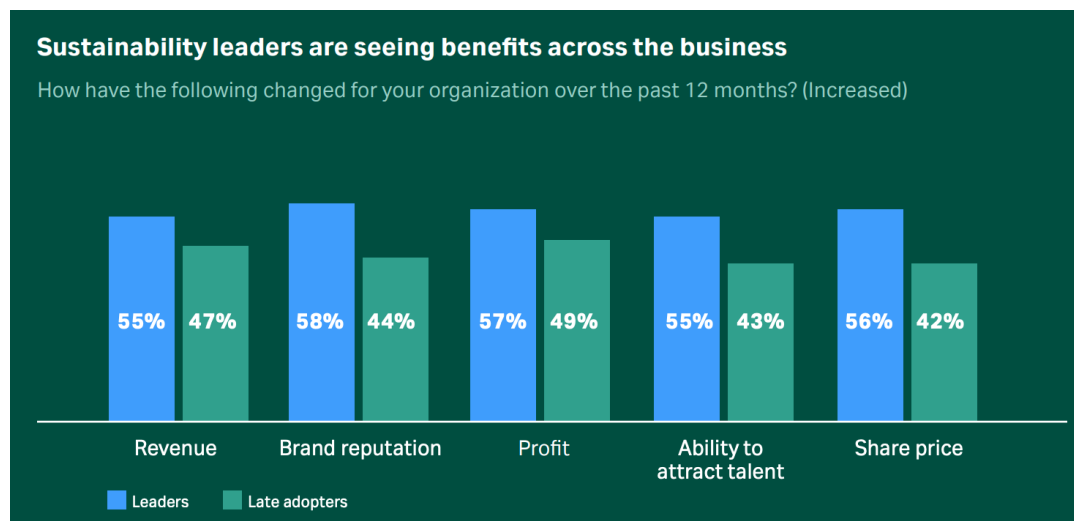
To give you the perspective from the universities, Lisa Blackburn from the Northwestern Universities Procurement Consortium will also be joining us. She will have information on the upcoming pipeline of university tenders and suggestions about how you can succeed in the tender process.

We will also have one of the leading lights in training scientists to use laboratory equipment, Dr Han Wu, from University College London. Dr Wu is involved in key national fora on instrument use, modification and application for research and runs a special laboratory at UCL where those engaged in advanced research across the country can come to learn essential techniques and develop new ones. All these three important clients will provide conference delegates with their insights on how your customers need you to develop your products and how to win their business. All three will also be joining us for the conference dinner the night before the conference. The event will once again be returning to the lovely Stapleford Park Country House Hotel, near Melton Mowbray and will take place on 11 March 2025 with the conference dinner on the evening of the 10th.

Places at the dinner are limited. Book your place at the conference or the dinner, [here](#).

Pharma industry focused on competitive advantages of sustainability says survey

62% pharma and bio-pharma directors cited sustainability as their top priority for the next 5 years in a recent survey of 800 director-level pharma and biopharma professionals across 18 countries. Of the industry's leaders, 63% see sustainability as essential for gaining a competitive edge. Companies prioritising sustainability said they have increased revenue (55%), profit (57%), share price (56%), brand reputation (58%), and talent attraction (54%) as a result.

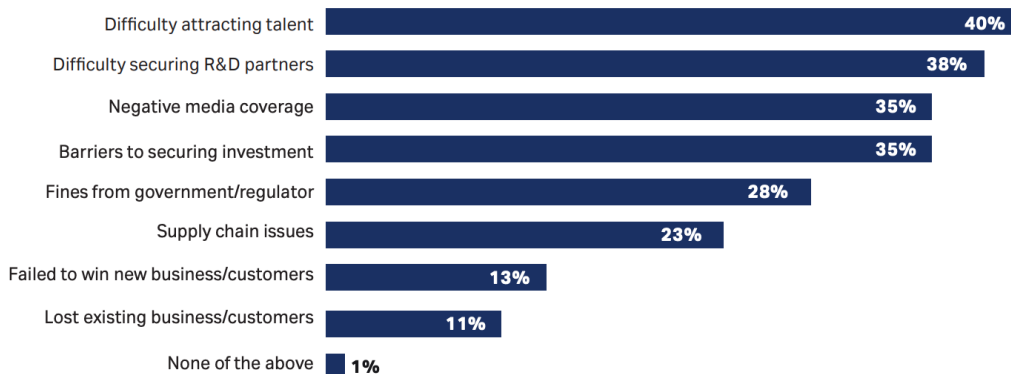


One of those surveyed, Matthias Berninger, Executive Vice President of Public Affairs, Science, Sustainability, and HSE at Bayer, said: “When we decided to create measurable targets in this area, it led to business decisions that ultimately paid off.”

Inevitably, fear also plays a part in encouraging the adoption of sustainability, approximately two-thirds (64%) of respondents felt that failing to achieve sustainability targets poses a significant threat to their businesses. Over a third of companies (35%) had experienced unfavourable media coverage due to inadequate progress on sustainability.

Poor sustainability progress threatens talent acquisition and partnerships

Has your organization experienced any of the following due to poor progress on sustainability?

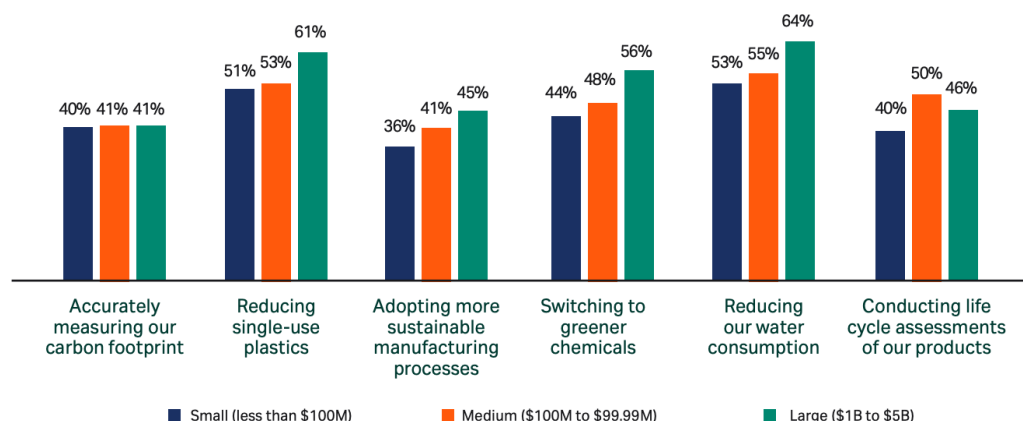


Working blind: 76% of biopharma professionals report that their methods for measuring the financial impact of sustainability initiatives are either unreliable or only somewhat accurate. Fortunately, robust data analytics and measurement systems are now available to help provide clear insights into the financial advantages of sustainability, ultimately helping to build a compelling business case for these strategies.

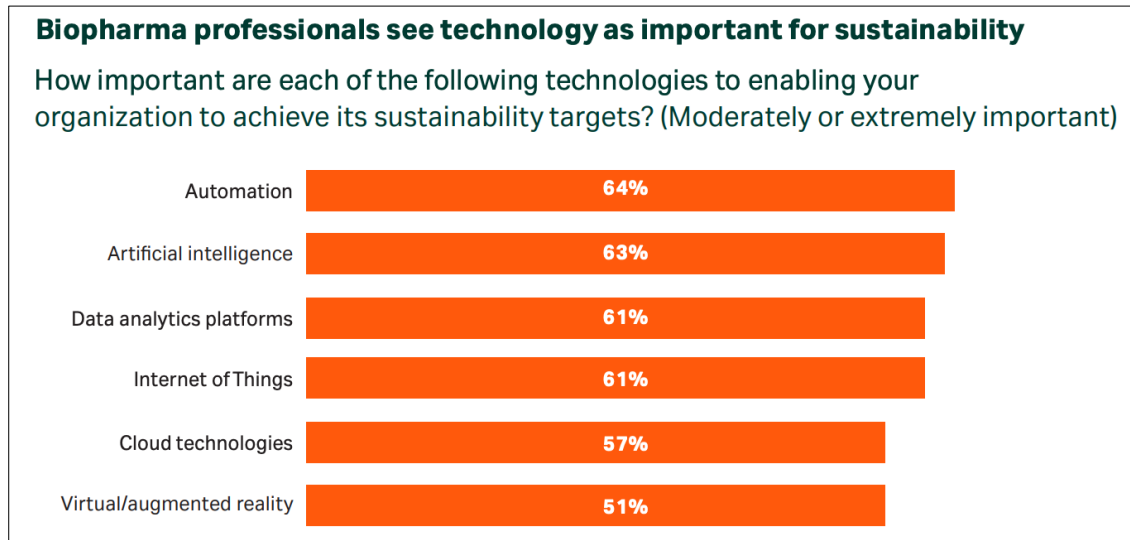
Supply chain impacts: Those surveyed see measuring Scope 3 emissions (those produced by their supply chain) as essential as it can help them distinguish between sustainability leaders and laggards among their suppliers. Such knowledge they said will inform critical decision-making in procurement, product development, and logistics. While recognizing that by leveraging their substantial buying power they can drive change, fewer than half (46%) of professionals currently consider themselves effective in improving supply chain sustainability, with only 17% expressing confidence in their ability to track Scope 3 emissions accurately, with the most proactive firms showing slightly better results at 29%.

Larger biopharma companies believe themselves to be leading the charge toward sustainability. Companies with revenues exceeding \$1 billion feel they are more effective in implementing sustainability initiatives compared to their mid-sized and smaller counterparts. This disparity is most pronounced in managing Scope 1 and 2 emissions, which encompass direct emissions from owned sources and indirect emissions from purchased energy.

How effective is your organization at each of the following currently?
(Very or extremely effective)



Aude Arkam, Global Head of Eco Design and Circular Economy at Sanofi, observed, “Technology can absolutely help in the measurement of emissions. We can use generative AI for life cycle assessments, decreasing the time it takes to collect data extracts and generate reports.” However, fewer than a third of companies are leveraging automation (29%) and AI (28%) extensively. The report concludes that this under-utilisation represents a significant opportunity for businesses.



To view the full report by Cytiva click [here](#).

Would you like to be nominated for the Analytical Scientist Innovation Awards?

NOMINATIONS ARE open for *The Analytical Scientist* magazine’s innovation awards 2024. I am happy to complete nominations for GAMBICA members, but vendors of equipment are eligible to nominate themselves if you prefer.

The rules:

- The deadline for entry is Friday, October 18, 2024. Only those chosen to be highlighted in the December issue of *The Analytical Scientist* magazine will be contacted.
- The technology or solution must have been released between October 20, 2023, and October 18, 2024 and it must be expected to have a significant impact on analytical science.
- Entries *must* include proof of release – such as a press release – within the above timeframe.
- Nominations will be assessed by a judging panel and the top technologies and solutions of the past 12 months will be showcased in the December issue of *The Analytical Scientist*.
- Queries to james.strachan@texerepublishing.com .

To learn about last year’s winners, [click here](#). [Nominate here](#) or if you prefer me to nominate you, please email me with details of the product and I will give you a call.

Best of luck! Jacqueline

Small batch manufacturing survey

THE UNIVERSITY of Oxford's Oxford Robotics Institute (ORI), in collaboration with the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) and Imperial College London, has developed a survey on Automation for Small-Batch Manufacturing. This survey seeks to understand the needs, experiences, and challenges faced by manufacturers with high-mix, small-batch production portfolios. The goal of the survey is to identify ways to accelerate the traditionally challenging adoption of automation in this space.

Outcomes of this survey will be published in a whitepaper co-authored by Oxford Robotics Institute, MTC and Imperial College London.

If you would like to take part, click [here](#).

Outdated product safety legislation putting UK public at risk



AROUND ONE third of UK retail sales are now conducted online, but our product safety legislation has not kept pace with changes in shopping habits, says the Trading Standards Authority. There is growing concern about the safety of some products sold through online marketplaces. Cheap, counterfeit goods and dangerous products, such as e-scooters and mobile phone chargers, and grey market food products, are increasingly being imported and sold through online marketplaces.

In 2022/2023, Suffolk Trading Standards Imports Team found that 49% of consignments examined at the port of Felixstowe contained unsafe products which were refused entry, including toys, nursery goods, electrical goods and e-scooters. In total 135,000 unsafe products across 405 product lines and 189,000 non-compliant goods across 311 product lines were detected by the Suffolk Imports Team.

Outdated product safety legislation means some online marketplaces and other platforms have argued that they have no legal obligation to ensure products supplied by third-party sellers through their platforms comply with legal requirements and are safe.

The EU including the EEA, have already updated their legislation, through the EU Market Surveillance Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and the General Product Safety Regulation (EU) 2023/988, specifically addressing challenges linked to online sales by including a definition for providers of online marketplaces, and by introducing product safety obligation on them.

Winner of 2024 Freezer Challenge saves nearly 8000 kWh per day

BIOTECH COMPANY, Amgen, winner of the 'Top Organisation' award in this year's Freezer Challenge, has managed to save 7,671 kWh/day, by optimising the operation of its chiller plant. The Freezer Challenge, which aims to promote best practice in cold storage management saw a surge in participation in 2024, with over 3,100 labs from 239 organisations across 35 countries committing to reducing their cold storage energy consumption.

Hosted by the International Institute for Sustainable Laboratories (IISL) and My Green Lab, this year's event saw participants achieving a total of 31.8 million kilowatt hours (kWh) in energy savings, leading to a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions - equivalent to 22,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide. This marks an impressive 50% increase compared to last year's results. Since its inception in 2017, the Freezer Challenge has collectively saved 76.5 million kWh of electricity, illustrating the ongoing commitment to energy efficiency in the laboratory sector.

In the Academic sector, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign was awarded the Top Organisation Award for saving 1,339 kWh/day. Johns Hopkins University, School of Medicine received the Lab Winning Streak Award for 154 kWh/day, while Coventry University and the University of Michigan's Histocompatibility Laboratory won the Large and Medium Lab Awards, respectively, with savings of 59 kWh/day and 80 kWh/day.

For more information click [here](#).

LAB construction updates

RSC launches campaign for more chem labs

THE ROYAL Society of Chemistry (RSC) is calling on government to address what it describes as an ongoing lack of access to suitable lab facilities in the UK.

According to the RSC, demand for UK lab space still massively outstrips supply, with developers reluctant to commit to the extra investment and infrastructure that chemistry facilities require. The RSC's '[Unlocking Innovation report](#)' suggests the lack of investment is linked to a lack of value case for deep tech lab developments. The lack of such a case is attributed to the specific lab facilities required differing widely between research areas and little having been done to assess the needs of the sector as a whole. This is compounded by a complex planning environment; chemistry specific requirements that aren't taken into account during property development; strategic narratives that overlook deep tech chemistry technologies; and a postcode lottery that disadvantages locations outside Oxford, Cambridge and London.



Aurora Antemir, Senior Manager, Enterprise Impact Programmes at the Royal Society of Chemistry, said: "Deep tech chemistry ventures are at the cutting edge of research and innovation. From reducing food waste to improving medical technologies, these ventures have the potential to solve many of the world's most pressing problems. We want to help take these technologies to the next level, by ensuring that suitable lab space is available to all. With no labs, there's no technology research, and no impact."

The Society is launching a new initiative – **More ChemLabs** – to catalyse change in the system affecting access to chemistry labs. This will entail bringing together passionate, connected people from across sectors, including the chemical sciences, property development, investment, government, and advocacy, to build a supportive landscape, make the case for more chemistry labs, and unlock investment into spaces that work. To view the full report or offer support, click [here](#).

Brazil builds Latin America's first level 4 biosafety lab

BRAZIL IS building Latin America's first biosafety level-4 (BSL-4) laboratory at the Brazilian Center for Research in Energy and Materials (CNPEM) in Campinas. The Orion facility will focus on studying the world's deadliest pathogens, crucial for responding to the rising threat of infectious diseases worsened by climate change and deforestation in the Amazon.

The government has allocated approximately \$180 million for this facility, which is expected to be fully functional by 2028. Orion will integrate with a synchrotron to enable advanced imaging and analysis, improving researchers' capacity to study how pathogens infect human cells.

India to upgrade its forensic labs

NEW CRIMINAL laws requiring forensic examinations in cases where the penalty would be more than seven years imprisonment have prompted the Indian government to commit the equivalent of more than £225 million to upgrading its forensic laboratories.

The funding will support the construction of new Central Forensic Sciences Laboratory (CFSL) facilities nationwide and improve infrastructure at the National Forensic Sciences University in Delhi. The project is scheduled for implementation from 2024-25 to 2028-29.

Sheffield to get new teaching labs

THE UNIVERSITY of Sheffield has applied for planning permission for a new Central Teaching Laboratories (CTL) facility to enhance its science education capabilities. The proposed building will span approximately 85,000 square feet across four floors, with a rooftop for equipment.

It will include advanced laboratories, such as two 300-person labs, a fume cupboard lab, an anatomy lab, and a tissue culture lab, accommodating 1,188 people—1,106 students and 82 staff.

Columbia University to spend \$400 Million on its Institute for Basic Biomedical Science

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY has received a gift of \$400 million which will be spent developing its Roy and Diana Vagelos Institute for Basic Biomedical Science. The new facility, spanning over 55,000 square feet, will feature cutting-edge, sustainable lab space.

The aim is to integrate research across Columbia's basic science and clinical departments, fostering collaboration in fields like cell engineering and gene therapy for cancer and neurological disorders, with the potential to revolutionise medical care.

US life sciences sector stabilizes amid market shifts

THE US life sciences industry is stabilizing and returning to steady growth after recent fluctuations says Nick Cassaro, VP of life science development at New York investment firm BGO. There has been a return to venture capital interest in companies with strong scientific foundations. Large pharmaceutical firms are also acquiring smaller companies to secure prime locations with an emphasis on sustainable sites says Salil Payappilly of BioMed Realty. A notable example is the Gateway of Pacific in South San Francisco, home to over 200 life science companies. This development benefits from a robust venture capital network and a skilled workforce, making it a key hub for growth and its sustainable buildings align with environmental goals.

Despite a supply-demand imbalance, venture capital is fuelling activity. Ken Richter of Project Management Advisors Inc. points out that while interest levels are below the peaks of 2020-2021, increasing venture funding provides tenants opportunities to secure high-quality properties at competitive rates.

Daniel Maldonado of Unispace believes sustained venture capital activity could stimulate leasing and reduce oversupply in life science real estate. While 2024 may not match the rapid growth of 2021, the outlook for the sector remains positive, positioning it for gradual recovery and future growth.

RESEARCH updates

Old vultures have fewer friends



A RECENT study has revealed that griffon vultures, like humans, become more selective in their social interactions as they age. Researchers from Tel Aviv University and UCLA tracked 142 vultures over a span of 15 years using GPS data, with their findings published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The study indicates that as vultures grow older, their attachment to specific roosting sites

increases substantially. Younger vultures often explore multiple locations and rarely remain in one place for more than a night. However, by middle age, they begin favouring familiar spots.

The research also found that older vultures establish tighter social bonds but spend less time interacting with those outside their close-knit circles. Older vultures tend to stick with their close friends, leading to more routine movements. This study is particularly noteworthy because it tracked the same vultures for nearly 12 years, providing an unprecedented perspective on how individual behaviours evolve with age in long-lived birds. The results indicate that vultures, similar to other animals, become more loyal to known locations and selective in their social relationships as they mature.

For more information click [here](#).

FDA approves new sepsis test

A NEW 10-minute blood test, IntelliSep, test which utilises artificial intelligence (AI) and digital imaging to identify biomarkers associated with sepsis has received FDA clearance.

Sepsis, often termed the 'silent killer', can be easily overlooked as its symptoms may mimic less serious illnesses. IntelliSep analyses blood samples to observe the behaviour of white blood cells, which change shape in sepsis. The test employs an ultra-high-speed camera to capture up to 500,000 frames per second and uses AI to assess the prevalence of elongated white blood cells, categorising patients into three risk bands: low, medium, and high.

In trials involving 1,002 emergency patients, IntelliSep demonstrated a 97.5% accuracy rate for identifying non-septic individuals and a 55% accuracy for detecting sepsis. The technology is currently being implemented in several hospitals in Louisiana, with plans to expand its availability.

For more information click [here](#).

Cone snail venom: a promising source for new diabetes treatments

RESEARCHERS FROM the University of Utah have made a significant discovery in diabetes treatment by identifying a hormone-like toxin named consomatin, in the venom of the deadly cone snail. This toxin mimics human somatostatin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar and hormone levels. The stability and precision of consomatin suggest it could serve as a blueprint for developing more effective diabetes and hormone disorder medications.

Consomatin acts similarly to somatostatin but with greater specificity, interacting with fewer proteins in the human body. This targeted approach may lead to treatments that manage hormone levels and blood sugar without the side effects common in existing medications. Studies indicate that consomatin could potentially regulate blood glucose more effectively than current synthetic drugs, which often have broader, uncontrolled effects. Researchers believe consomatin is just one of many beneficial toxins within cone snail venom. Identifying additional glucose-regulating toxins could lead to further innovations in diabetes treatment. For more information click [here](#).

Revolutionary anti-counterfeiting labels developed using dyed liquid crystals

RESEARCHERS AT Nagoya University have developed an anti-counterfeiting technology using fluorescent cholesteric liquid crystals (FCLCs). The approach builds on the existing security features of traditional cholesteric liquid crystals (CLCs) by incorporating fluorescent dyes, resulting in labels that are nearly impossible to replicate without advanced tools and expertise. These labels are poised to transform the way high-value goods, sensitive products, and important documents are protected.

The new labels utilise a unique feature called chirality, which refers to the twisting of the crystals' helical structures. This twisting determines how the crystals reflect light, producing a specific "light signature" that forms the primary security feature. When viewed under normal light, the labels appear as solid colours, giving no indication of their security function. However, when viewed through a circular polariser, hidden details emerge, revealing intricate features that serve as crucial anti-counterfeiting markers. Additionally, the labels can be designed with ultraviolet light-sensitive components, providing a second layer of verification.

Future developments could include QR codes that become visible only under polarised light or passwords revealed through ultraviolet light. For more information click [here](#).

TENDERS and opportunities

Cryocooler system

EU-XFEL are seeking a technology provider for a cryocooler system that includes a Helium cryostat, heater, temperature controller, and any necessary instrumentation adapters. The specific performance, dimensional, and interface requirements for the cryocooler system are:

- *Temperature Stability: $\pm 0.02K$ at the sample.*
- *Vibration: Ultra-low vibration cold head with vibration amplitude less than 150nm.*
- *Cooling Power (1st Stage): Minimum additional cooling power: >15W. Includes ultra-low vibration adapter and operation of the 2nd cooling stage at full cooling power (1.5 W @ 4K).*
- *Cooling Power (2nd Stage): Minimum cooling power at 4K: >1.5W. Includes ultra-low vibration adapter.*
- *Temperature Range: Accessible temperature range at sample position: 4K – 325K.*

If you would like to be considered to receive the tender documents when issued provide your company name and address, contact details including email, telephone and web address along with 'highlights' to julie.gilbert@stfc.ukri.org

Please note: this is a request for information only and not a tender. XFEL has asked for information on known companies who have the potential to provide this equipment which they will use for future reference for opportunities in this sector.

The European XFEL is a research facility using high-intensity X-ray light to study the structure of matter. The facility has more than 300 employees and is located in Hamburg and Schenefeld, Germany.

New engineering framework

North Western Universities Purchasing Consortium has issued a 'prior information notice' that it will be seeking providers to go onto a new engineering framework it will issue shortly. To read the prior information notice, [click here](#).

GAMBICA events

Six practical steps to future-proofing your funding | online | 17 October, 10.30 am



FOLLOWING JULY'S General Election, the Labour government is now several months into its administration. Ahead of the new Chancellor's first fiscal event (the Budget on 30 October), we'll discuss what this means for manufacturing businesses – and share six actions you can take to access innovation funding opportunities.

The Prime Minister has promised an 'age of national renewal' driven by an industrial strategy with innovation at its heart.

Boosting private sector investment in R&D will be vital to achieving this and innovation incentives have an important role to play.

Sarah Jackman, Angela Banerjee, and Joanne Chance will draw on Forrest Brown's survey of manufacturing businesses, to identify potential barriers to investing in innovation and suggest practical actions to overcome them.

From R&D tax relief to government grants, they will explore the full innovation toolkit to ensure you can access the funding your business needs. The team will equip you with the tools to futureproof your innovation investment strategy.

The webinar will cover:

- The government's approach to innovation incentives.
- Priorities for manufacturing businesses.
- Opportunities for funding in the new innovation landscape.

To reserve your place, click [here](#).

Latest lessons from export enforcement and a masterclass in the HMRC digital hub | online | 22 October, 10.30 am

IN THIS webinar, Vince Taylor from Chamber International will offer lessons from the latest round of compound settlements imposed by the export control authorities and give a view on how to avoid being caught in the current clampdown. For all those who want to speed up their export activities, Vince will also provide a masterclass in using the HMRC digital hub including a live demonstration of how to use the UK tariff information including conditions, restrictions and additions and will touch on other regulations you may need to consider including UK REACH.

There is a new 'phone a friend' service available from Chamber International which can help provide you with the assurance you need that you are meeting the minimum standards on export compliance at a very low cost. There will be time to ask Vince about this service at the end of the webinar.

To reserve your place, click [here](#).

Maintenance requirements for ISO certified labs | online | 10 December, 10.30 am

THIS WEBINAR has been designed to help you improve the contribution of your service and other after-sales activities.

Certification body AUVA will explain the maintenance requirements for laboratories with an ISO quality management certification. They will also provide detailed guidance on the requirements and suggest how laboratory equipment suppliers' service contracts can be designed to specifically match the ISO requirements.

The webinar will be presented by Graham O'Geran. To book your place, click [here](#).

INDUSTRY events

BioTechx | Basel | 9-10 October 2024

GENERATIVE AI has the potential to revolutionise various aspects of the life science industry and [BioTechX Europe](#) claims to be at the forefront of thinking around Generative AI and biotechnology. The agenda covers Digital Transformation, LLM and Data Management, Storage & Architecture. Contact Alistair Wilmot about remaining opportunities email: Alistair.Wilmot@terrapinn.com

Festival of Biologics | Basel | 15-17 October 2024

A CONFERENCE designed for experts working in antibody therapies, immunotherapies and biosimilars, featuring 150 speakers from Cancer Research UK, Novartis, Roche, Numab, Pierre Fabre and others. It covers discovery, development, manufacturing, market access, and fill and finish. The agenda will be released next month. Tickets cost 150 Euros and there will also be a small exhibition. For more information click [here](#).

- [Lab of the Future Europe, Amsterdam, Netherlands, October 1st-2nd, 2024](#)
- [ELRIG Drug Discovery 2024, London, UK, October 2nd-3rd, 2024](#)

Global innovation and new technology health event | London | 9-10 December 2024

THIS EVENT is described as the NHS innovation festival and comprises the UK National ICS congress, the mental health technology show, the future hospital show, the women's health technology show and the net zero technology show. For more information click [here](#).

CIM2025 International Metrology Congress | Lyon | 11-14 March 2025

CO-LOCATED WITH France's largest industrial trade show this event aims to be a hub where science, industry and metrology players come together. For more information, click [here](#).

Solutions in Science | Cardiff | 8-10 July 2025

FEEDBACK FROM visitors to the last SinS conference in June 23 was positive and the next event has now been scheduled. The aim of SinS is to showcase complementary and diverse ranges of analytical instruments, technologies, applications and present solutions to scientists from a range of industries and academic disciplines.

To book your exhibition stand contact Chris Jarvis chris@labmate.com 01727 855574.

EXPORT news

UK signs trade pact with Thailand



THE UK and Thailand have signed an Enhanced Trade Partnership to boost trade and investment between the two countries.

Thailand is the second-biggest economy in Southeast Asia and trade between the UK and Thailand is already worth £5.9 billion a year. The Thai economy is rapidly growing, and its middle class is expected to more than double to almost

14 million by 2030, creating huge opportunities for UK businesses to tap into. Minister of State for Trade Policy Douglas Alexander said: "Thailand's growth is something the UK can and should be capitalising on. This Partnership will bring our two countries closer together and help British businesses sell to Thailand, supporting jobs and growth around the country."

ECJU removing access to case workers in the name of ‘process improvement’

THE UK Export Control Joint Unity (ECJU) in a tacit admission that it is not meeting its own targets for processing export licence applications, has announced that it is taking steps to modernise its processing practises as it moves to the new licencing platform LITE.

Unfortunately, the steps it is taking mean that all enquires will now be routed through a centrally managed mailbox and phone number and it is removing access to the Licensing Unit’s direct contact details. The notice says: “This will ensure we are able to respond to queries efficiently and effectively, avoiding for example delays to responses due to individuals being on leave or unavailable.”

The ECJU says that it considers each application in chronological order, working with colleagues in other government departments (OGDs). The notice continues:

“Our aim is for your contact with ECJU to be consistent and efficient, while enabling case officers to focus on progressing applications. We are unlikely to prioritise responding to follow-up correspondence for applications which are within our primary target of 20 working days. Once cases are more than 20 working days old ECJU will be happy to help you with an update on progress.”

This change takes effect from 1 October 2024.

New contact details for ECJU

To contact the help desk team:

- email: exportcontrol.help@businessandtrade.gov.uk
- phone: 020 7215 4594

For technical queries about LITE, such as reporting issues or missing functionality, email: LITE.Support@businessandtrade.gov.uk.

Suspect Bills of Lading from China

LOGISTICS PROVIDERS and exporters are increasingly collaborating to manipulate shipping documents and defraud banks, according to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB). This trend is especially common in Chinese steel exports, making steel the top commodity associated with ‘suspect’ bills of lading (BLs) flagged by banks in the second quarter of this year.

“Collusion between importers, exporters, and often freight forwarders is becoming more frequent in cases of falsified or suspicious documentation,” the IMB reported.

The IMB, part of the International Chamber of Commerce, investigates questionable trade documents and checks if the trades align with the BLs. A suspect BL is one where the bureau “cannot confirm the shipment occurred as stated.”

The IMB noted a 10% rise in flagged documents from the previous quarter and an 11.4% increase from the same time last year, warning that such falsifications can also facilitate trade-based money laundering.

The report also highlighted that beyond Asia Pacific, countries like Turkey, the UAE, and Oman are frequently named in suspect BLs, especially in agriculture and raw chemicals.

Increase in visa sponsorship licences being suspended or revoked

THE HOME Office is mounting a clampdown on businesses and has doubled the number of employers who had their ability to sponsor skilled worker visas cancelled. In the second quarter of 2024 1,023 employer licences were cancelled compared to just 519 in the first quarter of the year according to the latest [Home Office data](#). In the second quarter of 2023, just 89 employers had their licence suspended and 28 had it revoked.

The latest enforcement of compliance among sponsors comes in light of wider efforts to reduce immigration figures, most notably in the form of [changes to visa rules](#) under the former Conservative government. The reforms, which came into force in April this year, mean care workers are no longer able to bring partners or children with them to the UK, and sponsors must now pay workers a minimum salary of £38,700, compared to the previous threshold of £26,200.

The changes to visa rules has led to a drop in the numbers of overseas workers looking to come to work in the UK, according to [Home Office figures](#) – there were 286,382 work visas granted in the year ending June 2024, 11 per cent fewer than the previous year. ‘Health and Care Worker’ visas dropped to 89,095 in the same year, falling by 81 per cent in the quarter April to June 2024 and 26 per cent compared to the previous year.

What should employers be doing?

Employers are advised to regularly check that their licence details are up-to-date and any relevant changes of circumstances to the organisation or sponsored migrants have been identified and reported to the Home Office in good time, as well as to review files to ensure record-keeping duties are met in full.

[Read the CIPD factsheet on recruiting overseas workers in the UK](#)
