

#techassess



POST (UK)

June has been a busy month on the political calendar with the Queen's Speech at the end of May setting out the upcoming legislation for the next year and the recent EU referendum. [We signed an agreement with the Chilean Parliament](#) to help them set up a scientific advice service and we'll be sending over one of our staff to help them hit the ground running.

We've had a few publications coming out on a variety of topics including [Financial Technologies](#), [Infant Mortality and Stillbirth](#), [Sugar and Public Health](#) and [Marine Microplastics](#). Click, a BBC World Service programme, interviewed Lydia Harriss about the Financial Technology POSTnote and our Marine Microplastics note accompanied a select committee press release which featured in several news reports.

TA-SWISS (Switzerland)

In Switzerland part-time work has long been established, with 37% of the working population, one of the highest in Europe, working part-time. Moreover, a quarter of all Swiss employees work at least partially from home which is again one of the highest in Europe. But increasingly, driven by the uptake of new communication technology, other forms of flexible work are being added to the mix: locational flexibility (work from anywhere, shared workspaces), numeric flexibility (temporary work, crowdsourcing, liquid talents) and the transfer of entrepreneurial risk to the employee. These shifts can benefit the work-life balance and productivity but they can also lead to self-exploitation, poor social benefits, avoiding of labour regulations and tax evasion.

In its latest study, "Flexible New World of Work – Taking inventory on the societal and macroeconomic level", TA-SWISS analyses the impact of different forms of flexibilisation for employers, employees and the economy as a whole. One of its main conclusions is macroeconomic benefits of flexibilisation depend on adequate qualifications. More details here: <https://www.ta-swiss.ch/en/projects/information-society/flexible-new-world-of-work/>

ITA (Austria)

Smart technologies and society was focus of the ITA's recent annual TA conference on May 30 in Vienna. The smart revolution will change different areas of our lives significantly as our refrigerators start ordering milk, industrial machines make crucial production decisions and vehicles drive us around automatically. But how realistic are the promises of simplicity, efficiency and optimization, which are attached to these data-driven technologies? What impact will this development have on a democratic society, our work environments and our

privacy? At its annual conference, the Institute of Technology Assessment (ITA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OEAW) focused on this wide range of aspects. The 26 talks ranging from the internet of things and smart manufacturing to artificial intelligence, big data, smart energy and assistive technologies for the elderly. “Our task here is to not blindly follow the hype”, ITA director Michael Nentwich pointed out in his opening address. Keynote-speaker Dirk Helbing (ETH Zurich) stressed the risks of increasing digitalization and data-mining for our democracy and societies in general: “We can decide how we want to use the tons of data available. We are already heading towards manipulation and privacy infringement. We could, however, also decide to upgrade on our freedom and our social experience.”

ITAS (Germany)

In the next decade science, business and civil society in Germany need to work hand in hand to develop new solutions to transform the energy system. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is awarding €400 million in research grants to support them. The aim is to develop new energy concepts by 2025 which can be applied on an industrial scale – and which are also socially acceptable.

ITAS will [participate in all four of the chosen consortia](#). The scientists will be working in many areas including

- reducing the costs of grid conversion by a combination of centralized and decentralized power generation
- assessing the sustainability of large-scale storage of fluctuating renewable energy in the form of chemicals, gaseous energy sources and fuels.
- examining the social impact of flexible adaptation of industrial systems to a fluctuating power supply from renewables
- and developing roadmaps for energy transition and assess the market potential of different technologies.

NBT (Norway)

In 2004, the American Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) held its first challenge to make an autonomous vehicle. None of the participants managed to solve the problem. Today, Google’s self-driving vehicles have logged about 2.5 million kilometres, and cars with autopilot functions are already on the market. Autonomous cars have in the span of a few years gone from the realm of science fiction to pressing policy matter. The [Norwegian Board of Technology](#) has written a [policy brief](#) on the subject in order to spark a debate and raise awareness of future challenges that need to be addressed now. The note highlights key policy questions, possibilities and challenges, and developments at home and abroad, and has been the subject of a programme on national radio and of a meeting in the Norwegian Parliament.

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