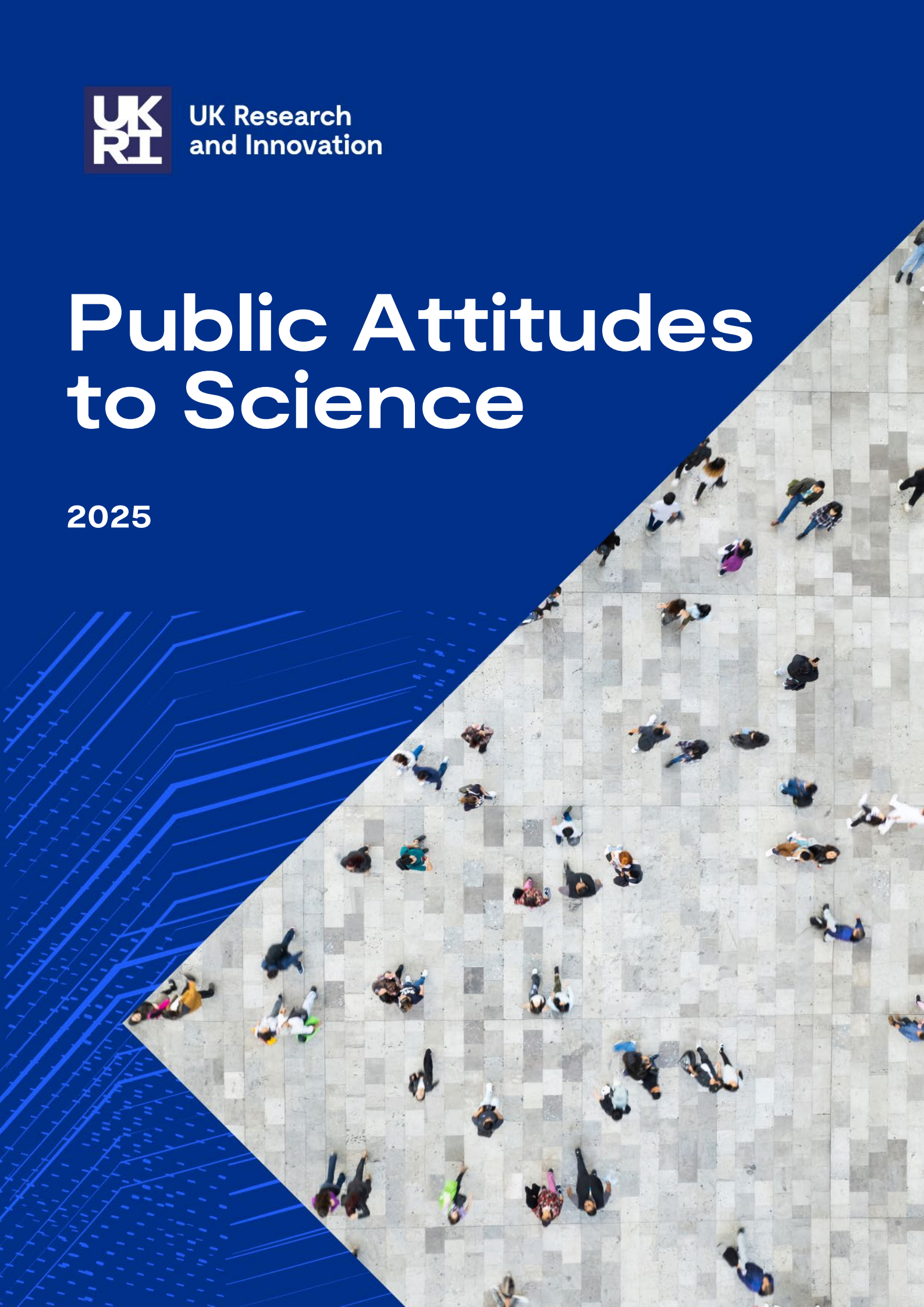
UK Research and Innovation

Public Attitudes to Science

2025



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Foreword

> **There is no route to stronger growth in this country, no answer to how we pay our way, or compete with the rest of the world, without science, technology and innovation leading front and centre.**
>
> Liz Kendall, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology

As Chief Scientific Advisor within the Department for Science, Innovation& Technology (DSIT), I have seen science drive social and economic growth. I have seen engineering innovation transform the prosperity of local communities and create opportunities for many individuals from diverse backgrounds. It has never been more important to ensure that the public are informed about, and that they inform, the trajectory of science and engineering which will shape lives of future generations.

For over 25 years, the Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) work has used a range of methods including surveys and interviews to deliver an understanding of public attitudes to science, engineering, and technical innovation.

The findings from the most recent survey reveal a public that values the social and economic benefits from science and innovation. Eight in ten of the public think scientists make a valuable contribution to society. This provides strong support for the record investment of £86bn in public R&D from the recent Spending Review.

Our work on PAS also helps identify areas of challenge, for example, in public confidence that scientists will follow ethical principles and regulations. Such findings inform the Government Office for Science's mission to develop 'best practice' case studies and methodologies for the use of evidence to inform policy https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/science-advice-in-action.

Our results show the importance of demonstrating how science can benefit our daily lives, as only four in ten think science has increased their own personal prosperity. Similar evidence has motivated DSIT to engage more directly with local communities; explaining how investment in new forms of network analysis enables the integration of renewables to deliver cheaper energy bills. Similarly, our partners at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) have created Community Research Networks across all four Nations to engage the public in locally focussed, place-based, research.

Young people are more negative about their experience of science at school compared to older adults – a concerning insight that will help inform the revised UK national curriculum being drafted for release in 2027.

The report also highlights gender disparities. Women are more likely than men to stress the importance of scientists demonstrating ethical behaviour and being representative of the UK population. This reinforces initiatives such as the DSIT Secretary of State's Women in Tech taskforce and funding for the UK's Women in Innovation Awards (£4.5m to support 60 female founders in scaling their businesses).

The findings in this report motivate a renewed engagement with a 'whole of society' approach. I strongly believe that this survey provides the policy foundations for meaningful engagement with the public as we collaborate to enhance the social and economic prosperity of our country.

Professor Chris Johnson
Chief Scientific Advisor,
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Summary

Over the last 25 years, the Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) studies have provided data on what people in the UK think about science, scientists and science policy, and how informed and engaged they feel when it comes to science issues.

PAS 2025 marks several firsts. It is the first in the series to take place after the Covid-19 pandemic and at a time when the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has become commonplace. It asks new questions covering representation in science and delves deeper into how people seek and receive information on science. It also shifts from face-to-face to predominantly online ("push-to-web") data collection, which futureproofs the approach. This means that later editions can be undertaken and reported more quickly, with a much bigger sample size than before. In total, 5,281 UK adults aged 16 or over completed the survey between February and July 2025.

The findings reveal a public that values science and scientists, where more people are discussing science with those around them than before. However, the greater numbers engaging have not necessarily led to deeper engagement. And despite greater access to information on science, fewer people feel informed. Trust and certainty have eroded since the pandemic, with responses showing more neutral or uncertain views – especially among young people – and divisive attitudes toward AI. Historic gender gaps remain. The findings highlight an urgent need to involve and represent the public in decisions on science, to better understand the factors behind increasing uncertainty, and to give people a sense of personal connectedness to science at multiple touchpoints across their daily lives.

The key headlines are:

- A public that continues to value science, research and innovation
- A new backdrop of uncertainty, ambivalence and loss of trust
- Fewer people feeling informed in an evolving media landscape
- A younger generation more divided about science's place and contribution
- Women continue to feel less informed and approach science differently
- A desire for public involvement, dialogue and representation

A public that continues to value science, research and innovation

The PAS series continues to highlight **a public broadly at ease with science and technology, who value the contributions of science and scientists to their daily lives, wider society and the economy**. Eight in ten of the public thought scientists made a valuable contribution to society (82%). Roughly two-thirds felt technology was improving people's lives (67%). A similar proportion agreed that research and innovation made a direct contribution to economic growth (69%). Across the survey, the concepts of "science" and "research and innovation" were similarly understood.

Long-term trends – from the first PAS survey in 2000 and earlier social attitudes surveys dating back to 1988 – show how **attitudes have moved over a generation**. People have become more accustomed to scientific development and technological change. In 1988, 32% felt that

that the benefits of science were outweighed by harmful effects. This has more than halved, to an historic low of 13%. In 2000, 66% believed that science and technology were too specialised for most people to understand. This has dropped to 45%.

A new backdrop of uncertainty, ambivalence and loss of trust

The legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic – when science and scientists took a front-and-centre role in people's lives – appears to reverberate through public attitudes. PAS 2025 finds **fewer people feeling completely disengaged from science** compared to 2019 (the previous survey). This time, fewer people felt that science was "not for them" and fewer said they rarely or never spoke about science with friends and family.

However, the increase in the numbers engaging with science has not necessarily led to deeper engagement. Instead, various findings and trends point to a sense of uncertainty or ambivalence. That is, relatively large proportions providing neutral, rather than outright negative or positive responses. This could be because people are in two minds, indifferent, lacking interest, or do not feel they know enough to judge – or for a mix of these reasons.

There was often **uncertainty or ambivalence around the impacts of science** – how it informed policymaking, how it could help to address big societal challenges, and how it affected people personally. Two-fifths (43%) neither agreed nor disagreed that government ministers regularly use science to inform decision-making. And while 65% felt that science had increased the prosperity of society, only 43% agreed that it had increased their own personal prosperity.

There was also considerable **uncertainty around the intentions and work of scientists**. Half (51%) neither agreed nor disagreed that scientists know best what is good for us. While 43% felt that scientists were ethical, roughly the same proportion said they were neither ethical nor unethical, or that it depended on the situation. And compared to 2019, more people neither agreed nor disagreed that scientists want to make life better for the average person. These findings may help to contextualise **reduced trust in scientists working for government to follow rules and regulations** (down from 76% in 2019 to 69% in 2025) **and those working in private companies** (down from 57% in 2019 to 48% in 2025).

Fewer people feeling informed in an evolving media landscape

New media, encompassing social media platforms and YouTube, has become one of the main ways for people to access information on science. In the fortnight before the survey, people were just as likely to have actively sought science-related information via new media as via traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers or magazines – including online editions). Over eight in ten said they trusted the most recent information they had sought out, regardless of how it was arrived at – be it traditional media, new media, or through friends, family and colleagues (including via WhatsApp).

However, despite these new ways of accessing information, **the number of people feeling informed about science has fallen** (from 51% in 2019 to 43% in 2025), as has the number saying that the information they heard about science was "generally true" (from 50% in 2019 to 40% in 2025). Other trends may reflect a greater media polarisation, with people increasingly self-curating their sources of news and information. The proportions saying that the media

sensationalises science, or that conflicting information makes it difficult to know what to believe, have fallen consistently since 2014.

A younger generation more divided about science's place and contribution

Young people aged 16 to 24 often had distinct attitudes to science and scientists compared to older adults. These differences were not always present in earlier editions, so mark a shift in attitudes for this generation specifically. Compared to others, young people tended to feel more informed about science. They were also more interested in getting involved, for example by volunteering in a citizen science project. And for this age group, new media – particularly Instagram and TikTok – had surpassed traditional media as their primary way of seeking out or coming across science-related information.

However, they were also often **more ambivalent about the role of science, and more negative about their experience of science at school**. A third (32%) agreed that school put them off science, compared with 23% of all adults. They were less likely than others to agree that scientists made a valuable contribution to society, that the government should fund scientific research even if it brought no immediate benefits, and that science had increased their own personal prosperity.

Women continue to feel less informed and approach science differently

There have been historical differences in attitudes to science between women and men, which reappear in PAS 2025. **Women were less likely than men to feel informed about science** (35% versus 51%), less likely to think that the information they heard about science was "generally true", and less likely to want to be involved in decisions about science. They were also more likely to have **different priorities for scientists**. For instance, they were more likely than men to say that ethical behaviour, having the right intentions, and being representative of the UK population were key traits that scientists should have.

A desire for public involvement, dialogue and representation

The findings speak to **the ongoing importance of public involvement and dialogue on science issues**. Three-fifths felt they saw or heard too little information about science (62%, up from 47% in 2019). And just 12% felt that the public was sufficiently involved in decisions about science and technology (having consistently fallen from 21% since 2008).

However, there is also evidence of increasing uncertainty or ambivalence on this topic since 2019 – potentially as a reaction to public discourse during the pandemic. In 2025, there were more neither agreeing nor disagreeing that the government should act in accordance with public concerns about science, and that scientists should discuss the social and ethical implications of their work.

Most people believed – in new questions for PAS 2025 – that science needs to be representative. But **opinions were divided as to whether science was delivering for all groups equally**. Around two-thirds said that scientists should be required to involve all groups of the population in their research (64%). The same proportion considered it important for the people working in science to reflect all groups within the population. However, a third agreed that scientific advances tended to benefit the rich more than the poor (34%), with those

struggling to get by on their present incomes being even more likely to agree. And nearly half neither agreed nor disagreed that scientists don't consider "people like me" when designing their research (48%).

Science capital: how to deepen a sense of connectedness to science

PAS provides broad coverage of public attitudes rather than deep dives into individual technologies, applications or processes. Nonetheless, the series has identified topics that consistently polarise public opinion, such as genetically modified crops and the use of animals in medical research. **AI joins the list of highly divisive topic areas** in PAS 2025, despite people feeling relatively well informed about it compared to other topic areas. This demonstrates that information alone does not build public trust or deepen connections to science and technology.

Instead, the findings suggest that **a more rounded experience of science enables this deeper personal connection**. Once again, PAS looks at this through the concept "science capital" (first introduced in the 2019 study). The more science capital someone has, the more they have interacted with science and scientists, through friends, family, leisure, careers, media or study. In PAS 2025, higher levels of science capital were associated with more positive attitudes to science, greater trust in scientists and a greater willingness to engage in science issues. They were also correlated with greater scepticism around how science influenced government.

Conclusions: a different era for public attitudes to science

PAS 2025 offers critical insights for science communicators and others working in public engagement, academics, policymakers across government, advocacy groups and scientists themselves. We should not lose sight of the clear majorities of the public that value science and scientists, in terms of their contributions to UK society and the economy. And yet, beneath these majorities, there has been a rise in uncertainty or ambivalence, and a loss of trust compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic. Some historic challenges persist, such as women feeling less informed and less sure about the benefits of science. Others are new, such as the less positive attitudes and greater ambivalence among young people, and the divisiveness of AI.

More fundamentally, while more people are talking about science than before the pandemic, and access to science has expanded through new media, these factors have not necessarily increased people's connectedness to science on a deeper level. To change this, the findings suggest an ongoing need to involve the public in decisions on science issues, and to build the nation's science capital – their interactions with science and scientists at multiple touchpoints across their lives. There may also need to be further investigation as to what ambivalence truly means – is it indecisiveness, indifference, a lack of interest, a lack of knowledge, or a mix of these?

PAS 2025 provides a new baseline for attitudes to science in a post-pandemic era, where AI and new media use have become established aspects of daily life. That is why at least two more PAS surveys will be undertaken biennially, helping to build on the findings of this report, and provide regular insights into changes over time.

Scope and approach

Background

Over the last 25 years, the Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) studies have provided data on what people in the UK think about science, scientists and science policy, and how informed and engaged they feel when it comes to science issues. This is a rich and varied dataset, of use and interest to scientists, science communicators and others working in public engagement, academics, advocacy groups and policymakers across government.

This edition, the seventh under the PAS banner, was undertaken by Ipsos, in partnership with the British Science Association, on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the UK's national funding agency for science and research. It is the first of three surveys that will be carried out biennially for UKRI, providing more regular data than was previously available, to inform relevant discussions across government and wider society. It is also notably the first edition to take place since the Covid-19 pandemic and since the widespread integration of AI tools in public life.

PAS 2025 covers new ground, while maintaining the same core questions that have been asked previously. Three major new areas of exploration include representation in science, how people seek and receive information on science, and comparing "science" to "research and innovation", to see if the latter term evokes different considerations among the public. Several questions were asked to half the sample as being about "science" and to the other half as "research and innovation". Ultimately these two framings received very similar responses.

The aims of this report

This report covers the headline findings from PAS 2025. It focuses on a subset of the questions that best reflect the emerging narrative from the wider data, as well as the questions that were wholly new for this year. The data tables, providing access to the full question set, will be made available for readers alongside the full questionnaire and Technical report.

Methodology

This edition shifts from a face-to-face survey to a predominantly online one, known as a "push-to-web" methodology. This means participants were chosen at random and sent multiple postal invites with details of how to take part in the survey online. Those that did not complete an online survey were sent a paper version in the final mailing. The change in the methodology futureproofs the survey. It means that later editions can be undertaken and reported more quickly, with a much bigger sample size than before.

In total, 5,281 UK adults aged 16 or over completed a survey between 6 February and 4 July 2025. Of these, the majority, 4,647, took part online and the remainder used the paper version. The data has been weighted to be representative.

Previous editions have typically included qualitative insights alongside the quantitative survey data, whereas this and upcoming ones will focus on the survey. This will ensure more consistent data and complement UKRI's wider programme of qualitative research.

Full details of the sampling, fieldwork and weighting can be found in the Technical Report.

How to interpret this report

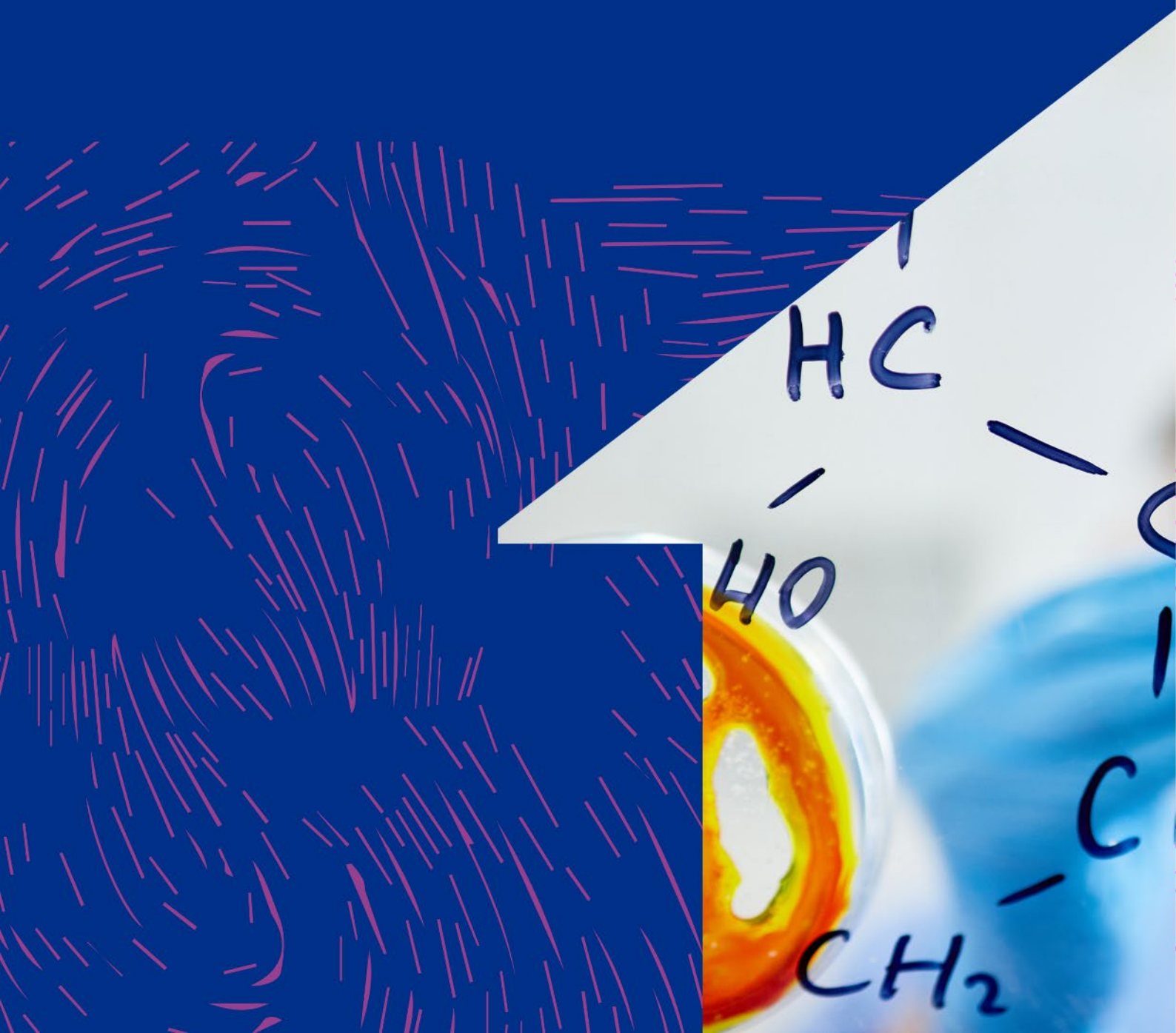
Here are the key things to bear in mind when reading through this report, with more comprehensive details in the Technical Report:

- **Margins of error** – the survey findings are based on a sample of UK adults rather than the whole population, so are subject to margins of error. For questions based on the full sample, the margin of error is approximately 2 percentage points. Some questions were asked of a random half of the sample, and the margin of error for these is approximately 2-3 percentage points, depending on the finding. Margins of error for subgroup findings (e.g., for specific age groups or by gender) will be higher.
- **Rounding of percentages in text and charts** – we only report percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. In addition, some charts exclude certain response categories (e.g., those saying "don't know") for simplicity. Therefore, the percentages shown will not necessarily add to 100%.
- **Trends over time** – the PAS series has undergone substantial changes in the methodology across years. Since 2011, it has used a random probability sampling methodology, for greater representativeness. This edition moves from face-to-face to predominantly online data collection. This means we must be cautious about one-off, unexplained changes in findings over time. In this report, we aim to contextualise all changes from 2019 to 2025 in terms of the longer-term trend where possible.
- **Subgroup differences** – when we compare a subgroup (e.g., 16 to 24 year-olds) to the average, we only report differences that are statistically significant, i.e., unlikely to have occurred by chance. We have focused on differences that are meaningful in size, thematically consistent across multiple questions, or important in the context of a single question. Differences by country or region are rarely mentioned, because they did not typically meet these criteria. The differences by gender focus on women and men, rather than other gender categories (e.g., non-binary) that had relatively small sample sizes. The full data tables are available to find specific subgroup percentages.
- **The science capital index** – this index was developed for the 2019 study and has been maintained for PAS 2025. It brings together data across multiple questions in the survey, to be able to segment people into three groups – high, medium and low "science capital". The more science capital someone has, the more they have interacted with science or scientists in their day-to-day lives, either through studying, careers, leisure activities, or friends and family. This is more nuanced than science literacy, i.e., simply knowing about scientific processes and facts. Across this report, we look at how those with high science capital were different to those with low science capital, and the final chapter brings together this content. This helps to demonstrate how a more rounded experience of science can deepen engagement.

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 1

What science means



1 What science means

This chapter covers the public's understanding of the term "science", their connection to science in their everyday lives, and the UK's perceived standing when it comes to science. This helps to provide a wider context for the rest of the findings from the study. For the first time, several questions were asked not just about science but also about "research and innovation", to understand if this term evoked different feelings.

The overall story

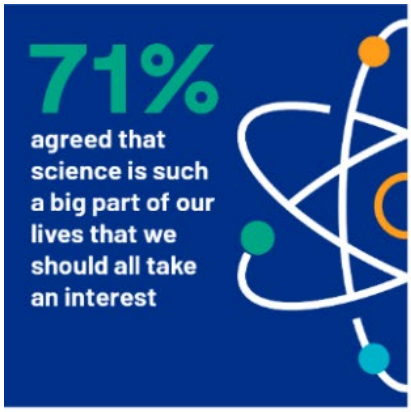
People continue to see science as a big part of public life. Moreover, compared to 2019, **more people have been talking about science with friends and family** and fewer people felt that science is "not for them". In addition, despite new advances in science and technology, the proportion saying these things are too complicated for the average person to understand has remained stable, at just under half.

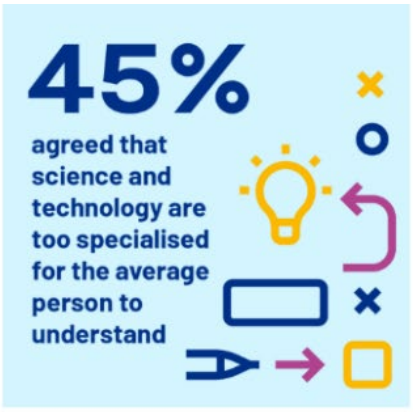
> **More people have been talking about science with friends and family**

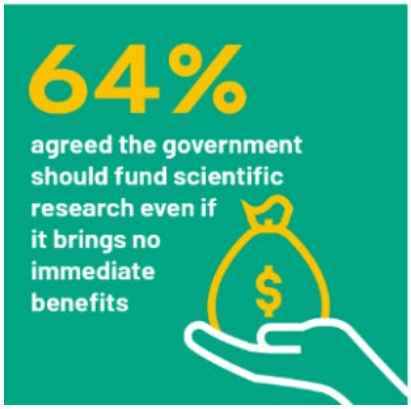
However, other trends suggest a more mixed picture. **Fewer felt informed about science than in 2019**. A smaller majority than before agreed that the government should fund blue skies scientific research that brought no immediate benefits. And while there was a strong sense that investment in science and technology contributed to the country's international competitiveness, there was also **considerable uncertainty around whether the UK is a world leader in science**.

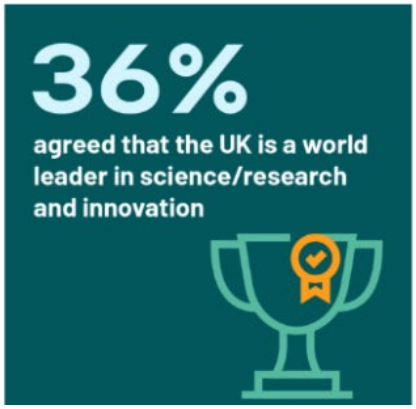
These nuances may reflect that science means different things to different people. And people's definitions often relate to how they interact with science in their daily lives. Furthermore, **the terms "science" and "research and innovation" had slightly different connotations**, which provides context for the rest of this report. Both terms were commonly associated with words like progress and improvement. However, science more commonly brought to mind specific fields or subjects, whereas **research and innovation was more often linked to themes like technology (including artificial intelligence), creativity and ideas**.

The headlines









1.1 Associations with science, and with research and innovation

We asked people, without prompting, about the words that came to mind when thinking about the term “science”. The most common categories of responses were:

33% specific scientific fields and subjects

30% research and investigation

29% innovation, progress and improvement

21% medicine, health and disease prevention

And for the first time, we asked the same question but in relation to “research and innovation”. This generated answers such as innovation, progress and improvement (42%), technology and tools (25%), and the future and visionary thinking (20%). The “technology and tools” category includes specific mentions of artificial intelligence (AI, mentioned by 6%).

This highlights the perceived strong overlaps between science, and research and innovation – in both cases, mentions of innovation, progress and improvement were common. However, it also shows that **the two terms had slightly different connotations among the public**. Technology, tools and AI were more strongly associated with research and innovation than science (25% versus 14%). Science was more commonly associated with specific fields or subjects than research and innovation (33% versus 15%).

Beyond these top-most connotations, there were other areas of overlap and difference among lesser chosen words or phrases. For example, for both terms, similar proportions of people mentioned positive values, ethics and benefits (14% for science, and 17% for research and innovation). However, the concepts of creativity and ideas generation were more commonly associated with research and innovation than with science (14% versus 3%).

Demographic differences

Demographic differences highlight that **science means different things to different people**, as does research and innovation.

There were differences by gender. When thinking about "science", women were more likely than men to talk about research and investigation, and to raise medicine, health, and disease prevention. When considering "research and innovation", men were more likely than women to mention technology, tools and AI.

Both terms also had different connotations among younger and older generations, potentially reflecting their own interactions with science. For science, young people aged 16 to 24 were more likely than average to mention specific scientific fields and subjects. For research and innovation, they were more likely to highlight technology, tools and AI. By contrast, older people aged 65 or over were more likely to raise medicine, health and disease prevention when they heard research and innovation. Older people were also more likely to mention the positive values, ethics or benefits that they associated with both terms. This reflects some of the age differences seen across the rest of this report, with young people being less inherently positive towards science.

1.2 Connectedness to science, and research and innovation

Feeling and keeping informed

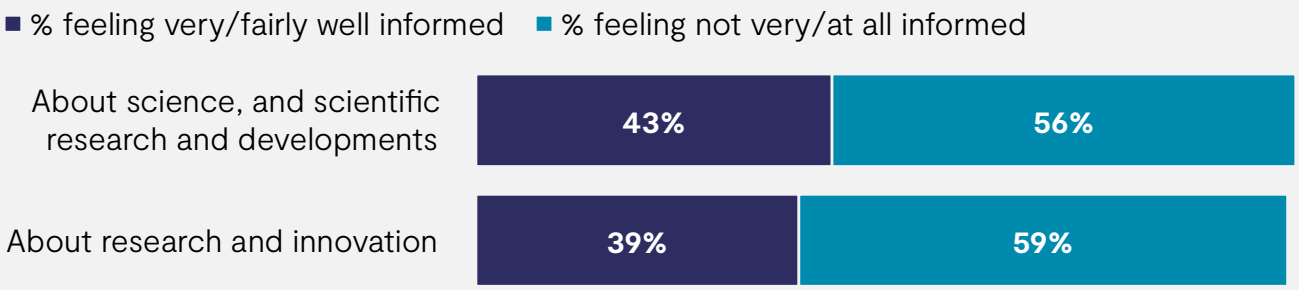
PAS has regularly asked the public how informed they feel about "science, and scientific research and developments". **The proportion feeling well informed about science has fallen** (from 51% in 2019 to 43% in 2025). The latest result is more in line with previous years, although it had notably been trending upwards until now – it was 40% in 2005, 43%in 2011 and 45% in 2014.

The proportion feeling well informed about science has fallen

This year for the first time, we also asked a similar question to see how informed people felt about research and innovation. As the chart below shows, these questions had very similar responses, with more of the public saying they felt uninformed than informed.

Feeling and keeping informed

How informed/uninformed people feel about science, scientific research and development/research and innovation



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. the chart excludes "don't know" responses

A separate question sheds more light on these findings. We asked the public to summarise their relationship with science against a series of options. A fifth (21%) said they felt connected with science, i.e., they actively sought out science news, events, activities or entertainment – this group might be described as highly engaged. The most common answer was that they were interested in science but did not make a special effort to keep informed (63%). A further 16% said that science was not for them, i.e. they were largely disengaged.

The people who felt uninformed about science were not necessarily keen to find out more. Among the fifth who felt connected with science and actively sought out content, just 14% said they felt uninformed.

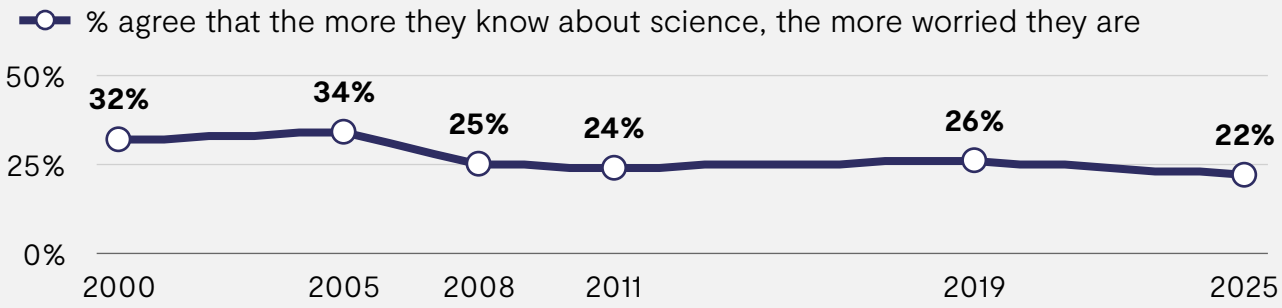
Nevertheless, **there has been a reduction in those who feel disengaged from science**. In 2025, fewer people said that science was not for them (16%, versus 22% in 2019). More said they were interested but did not make a special effort to keep informed (63%, versus 56% in 2019).

> **The people who felt uninformed about science were not necessarily keen to find out more**

Since 2000, the survey has asked people whether they agree or disagree that the more they know about science, the more worried they are. In 2025, 22% agreed, 37% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 40% disagreed. The chart below shows that agreement has trended downwards over time. People have instead shifted towards neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Feeling worried

Do people agree or disagree that the more they know about science, the more worried they are?

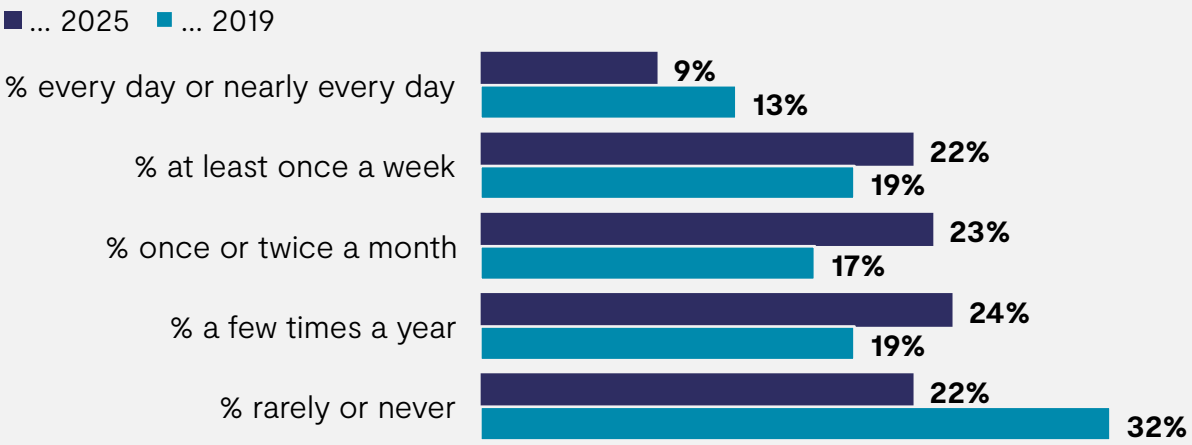


Base: 2,616 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

Finally in this section, we also cover people's conversations about science, which offers further evidence that outright disengagement has fallen. One in three people (31%) reported speaking about science with friends and family at least once a week, as the chart below indicates. One-fifth (22%) said they rarely or never spoke about science. This latter proportion has also dropped since 2019, when this question was first asked (from 32%, to 22% in 2025).

Frequency of speaking about science

How often people spoke with friends or family about science in...



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

Several demographic differences were apparent across these questions. These are consistent with previous years, and there was a similar pattern when asking about research and innovation rather than science:

- **Men were more likely than women to feel informed** about science (51% versus 35%).
- Younger people also tended to feel more informed about science than older people (53% of 16 to 24 year-olds felt well informed, versus 36% of those aged 65 or over).
- Graduates were also more likely than average to feel informed about both science (54%, versus 43% overall), and research and innovation (48%, versus 39% overall). However, there

were stark differences between those with science and engineering degrees (76% well informed), and those with social science degrees (51%) or arts and humanities degrees (47%).

Later in Chapter 3, we look at how informed people felt about specific areas of science or specific technologies.

Science and technology in people's lives

Several questions highlight **an ongoing common interest in science across the UK public**, stretching back to at least 2000 (when many of these questions were first asked). However, more recent shifts suggest **this interest in science is less strong than before**. While outright disengagement has fallen (as covered in the previous section), this has not led to deeper engagement and interest.

Several questions highlight an ongoing common interest in science across the UK public

Seven in ten (71%) agreed that science is such a big part of our lives that we should all take an interest. It is worth noting that this has fallen since 2019 (from 82% to 71%), having been relatively stable since the 2008 survey. Separately, around two-thirds (64%) agreed it is important to know about science in my daily life. While this latter result was similar in 2019, it had already fallen from a high of 72% in 2014.

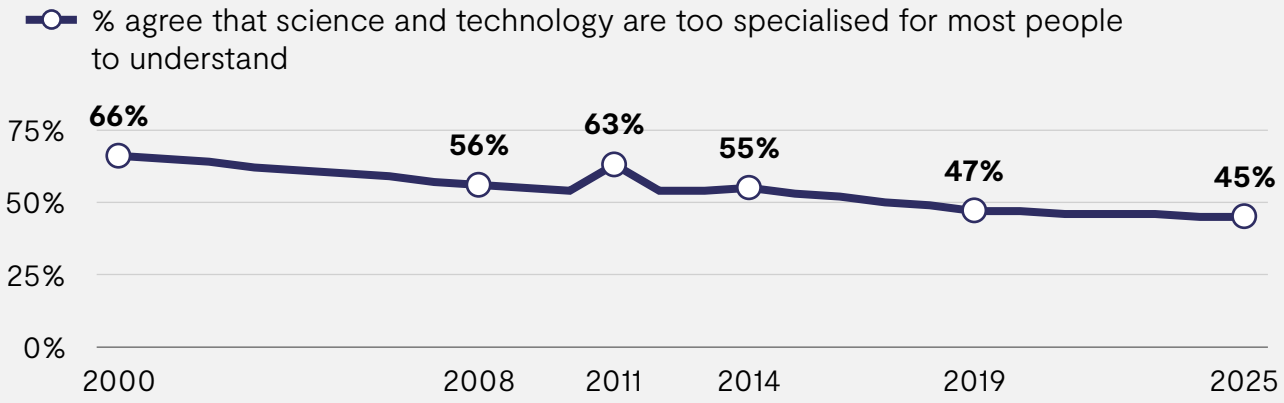
The long-term trend shows that **people have become more accustomed to scientific development and technological change**.

People have become more accustomed to scientific development and technological change

In 2000, 66% thought that science and technology were too specialised for most people to understand them. In 2025, this has fallen to 45% (see below). The more recent trend, from 2019 to 2025, shows no change. This is notable given the significant technological advances since 2019, particularly the widespread integration of AI tools in public life. However, there were important demographic differences in responses to this question (by age and science capital), covered at the end of this section.

Scientific and technological change

Do people agree that science and technology are too specialised for most people to understand them?



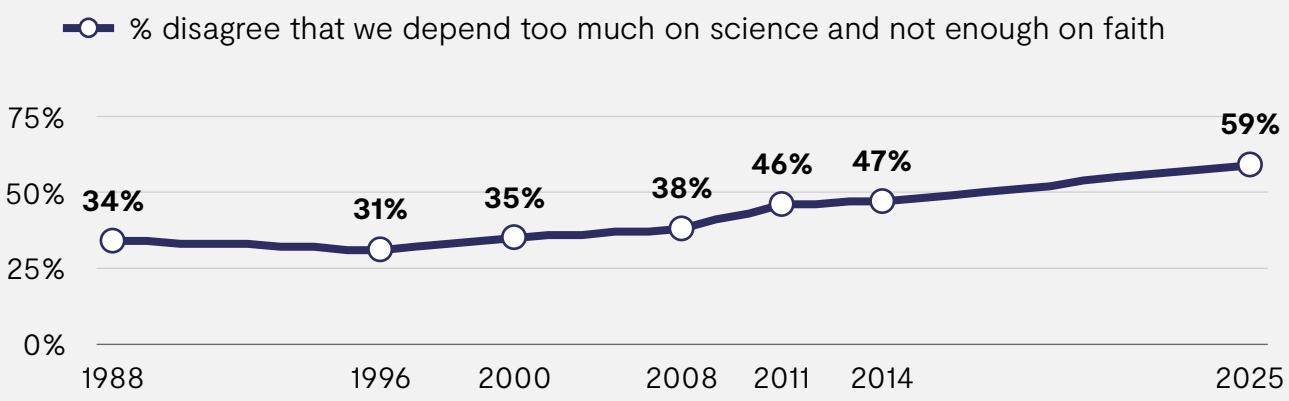
Base: 2,480 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

Finally in this section, we cover perceptions of science alongside faith, and science alongside personal experience.

- Six in ten (59%) disagreed that we depend too much on science and not enough on faith. This attitude has shifted greatly since this was first asked in 1988, as the chart below shows. The 1996 and 1988 data are taken from earlier social attitudes surveys carried out in the UK, before the PAS series came into being.
- Fewer (38%) disagreed that we depend too much on science and not enough on personal experience – a new question for 2025. A quarter (24%) agreed with this opinion, and 36% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Depend on science

Do people agree or disagree that we depend too much on science and not enough on faith?



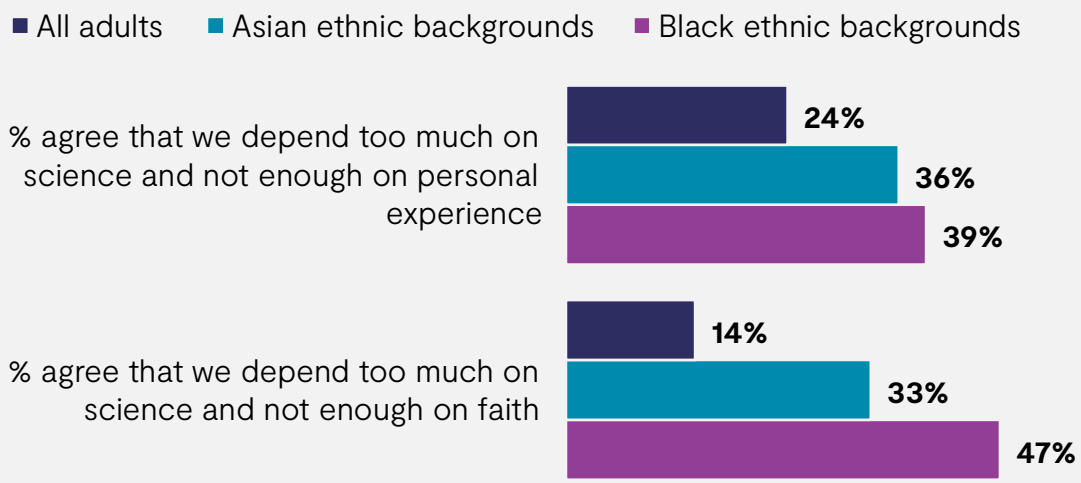
Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

These questions highlight important differences by age, ethnicity and science capital:

- Younger people aged 16 to 24 were less likely than average to agree that science is such a big part of our lives, we should all take an interest. On the other hand, older people aged 65 or over were more likely to feel that science and technology were too specialised for most people to understand.
- People with low science capital – those who had fewer interactions with science or scientists in their own daily lives – were also less likely than average to think that science is such a big part of our lives, we should all take an interest, and more likely than average to say that science and technology were too specialised for most people to understand.

There was more scepticism about the value of science versus faith, and versus personal experience, among ethnic minorities, particularly those from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds (shown below).

The value of science versus faith and versus personal experience



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over (372 from Asian ethnic backgrounds; 131 adults from Black ethnic backgrounds)

1.3 The benefits of science and the UK's position in science

This section helps provide a wider context for the rest of the report, in terms of understanding how the public value science, and what they think of the UK as a global contributor to science, and to research and innovation. Two questions show how opinions have become more positive in some ways, but more mixed in others.

Negative sentiment about the potential harms of science has receded. Half (53%) agreed that "the benefits of science outweigh any harmful effects". A further third (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 13% disagreed, i.e., they thought that science is more harmful than beneficial. The proportion disagreeing was the lowest it has ever been, tracing back to 26% in 1996 and 32% in 1988 (taken from earlier social attitudes surveys before the PAS series). Chapter 3 covers perceptions about the benefits and risks of specific areas of science and technology, and its perceived impact on society and the economy, delving deeper into this broad statement.

Two-thirds (64%) agreed that, even if it brings no immediate benefits, science which advances knowledge should be funded by the government – just 9% disagreed. This was down from previous years (76% in 2011, 79% in 2014 and 79% in 2019).

There was majority support for government-funded blue skies scientific research, although this support has weakened since 2019

Once again, these questions highlight significant and large differences by gender, age, education and science capital:

- Women were more likely than men to be uncertain or neutral about the benefits versus harms – 38% neither agreed nor disagreed that the benefits of science outweigh any harmful effects, versus 27% of men. This aligns with the earlier data showing that women tended to feel less informed and engaged with science.
- Graduates were more likely than average to agree that the benefits of science outweighed the harms (64%, versus 53% overall) and that the government should fund blue skies research (73%, versus 64% overall).
- Those with high science capital (who engaged more with science in their daily lives) were more likely to support government-funded blue skies research than those with low science capital (84% versus 44%).
- Young people aged 16 to 24 tended to be less positive and more neutral about government-funded blue skies research (33% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, versus 25% overall).

In new questions for 2025, we asked the public whether the UK was a world leader in science, and in research and innovation. This highlighted **considerable uncertainty around the UK's place globally in these areas**. A minority of the public agreed in each case, with 36% considering the UK as a world leader in science, and 38% considering it a world leader in research and innovation. Graduates were more likely than average to see the UK as a world leader in science – and this was consistent among science and engineering graduates, and among arts and humanities graduates.

Despite the uncertainty about the UK's current position, there was **widespread agreement that the UK needed to develop its science and technology sectors to enhance its international competitiveness** (75% agreed)**.** This opinion has been strongly consistent since the question was first asked in 2000 (when 79% agreed). This year we also asked a parallel statement about the UK's research and innovation sectors, and this had a very similar response, with 74% agreeing.

There was widespread agreement that the UK needed to develop its science and technology sectors to enhance its international competitiveness

Later in Chapter 3, we report other data showing the perceived economic impact of science, and of research and innovation. This illustrates that clear majorities believed that science (64%) and research and innovation (69%) were drivers of economic growth in the UK.

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 2

Views on scientists and researchers

2 Views on scientists and researchers

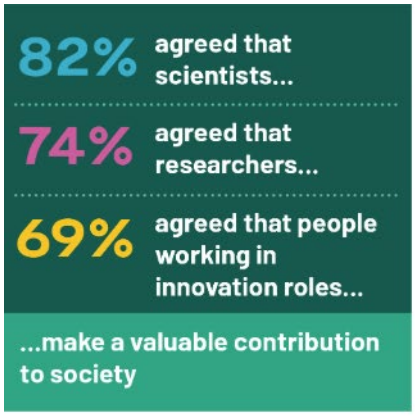
This chapter looks at public perceptions of those who work in science, including the traits associated with them, and the level of trust placed in them. Historically, these questions have been asked about scientists. We also asked certain questions for the first time about "researchers", and about "people working in innovation roles", to see if this framing evoked different attitudes.

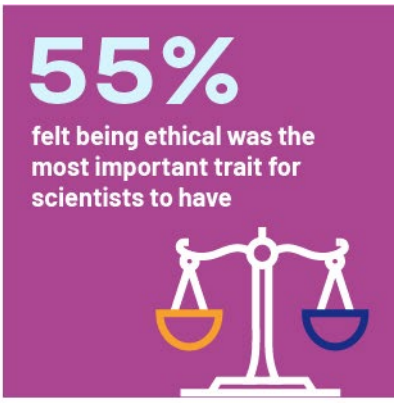
The overall story

Scientists, researchers and people working in innovation roles were all viewed favourably in terms of their contributions to society. Scientists specifically were thought to represent a number of positive traits, including being interesting, creative, competent, well-intentioned, open-minded and responsible. There was also a large amount of trust placed in scientists to follow the rules and regulations of their profession, although this continued to differ depending on the institutions they work for. **Scientists working for the government, pharmaceutical companies and other private companies tended to be less trusted**, as in previous years.

However, alongside this overall positive snapshot, the changes since 2019 suggest that **people have become more uncertain or ambivalent about scientists' contributions**. That is, relatively large proportions providing neutral, rather than outright negative or positive responses. This pattern of results could be because people are in two minds, indifferent, lacking interest, or do not feel they know enough to judge – or for a mix of these reasons. And while being ethical was commonly highlighted as the most important trait for scientist to embody, over two-fifths considered scientists to be neither ethical nor unethical, potentially impacting their sense of trust. Specifically, **trust has declined in scientists working for the government and private companies**.

The headlines





2.1 Scientists' contributions to people's lives

PAS has **consistently highlighted positive attitudes among the public towards scientists**. In this latest edition, 82% agreed that scientists make a valuable contribution to society, and 70% agreed that scientists want to make life better for the average person.

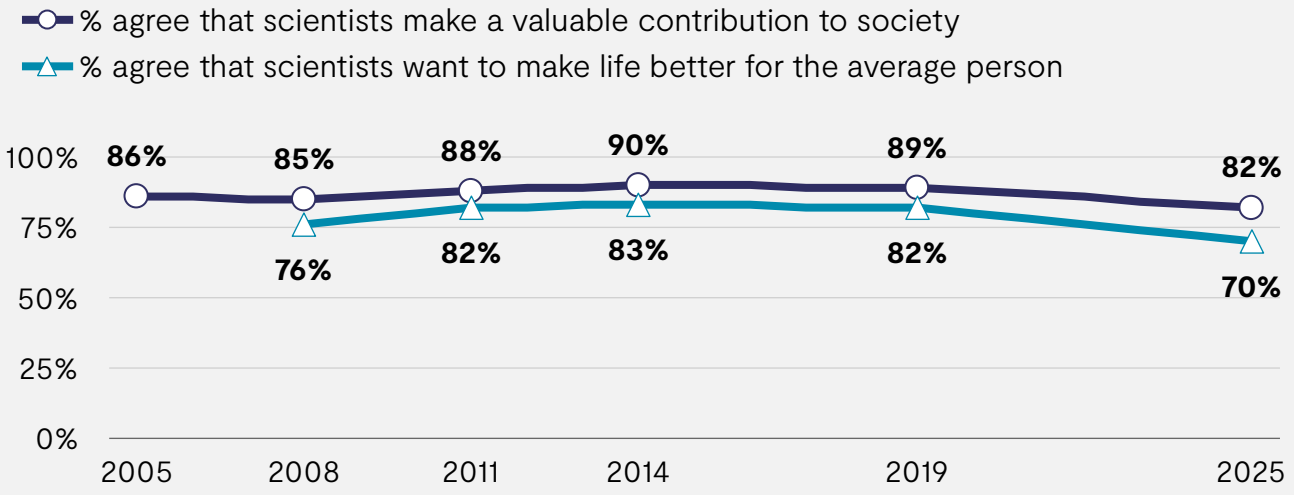
However, both these proportions have fallen since 2019, having been stable across previous years, as the chart below shows. This does not indicate a rise in negative attitudes, but more **an increase in uncertainty or ambivalence**, i.e., more people neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

PAS has consistently highlighted positive attitudes among the public towards scientists

This pattern is frequently observed across the survey results, and more work may be needed to better understand what is behind it. It could be that people are in two minds, indifferent, lacking interest, or do not feel they know enough to judge – or a mix of these reasons.

Scientists' contributions to people's lives

Do people agree or disagree that scientists make a valuable contribution to society/want to make life better for the average person?



Base: 2,616 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

For the first time in 2025, the question about scientists' contribution to society was repeated to ask about "researchers" and "people working in innovation roles". Here, there was less agreement – 74% agreed researchers make a valuable contribution to society and 69% felt this about people in innovation roles – but there was still a majority positive view of people in these roles.

It is important to point out that these groups – "scientists", "researchers" and "people in innovation roles" - were not defined in the question wording. Early questions in the survey showed that all three groups were understood in a largely similar way by those taking part. Moreover, the entire survey was primarily about science, which might have lessened the focus on researchers from other fields, such as the arts or humanities.

Other questions in the survey provide further context to these answers. For example, people were more likely to say they "don't really know" what a researcher does (16% agreed they don't know) than what a scientist does (11% agreed they don't know).

Uncertainty or ambivalence as to whether scientists know best what is good for us was evident

There was also **a great deal of uncertainty or ambivalence as to whether scientists know best what is good for us** – a new question for 2025. A fifth (21%) agreed with this statement, while a quarter (26%) disagreed, and half (51%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

The findings suggest complex differences in attitudes to scientists by age group, as well as reflecting the gender differences mentioned elsewhere in the report:

- Young people aged 16 to 24 were less inclined than average to agree that scientists make a valuable contribution to society and were less likely than older people to think scientists want to make life better for the average person. However, 16 to 24 year-olds were also the most likely age group to agree that scientists know best what is good for us.
- Women were more likely than men to agree they did not know what a scientist does.

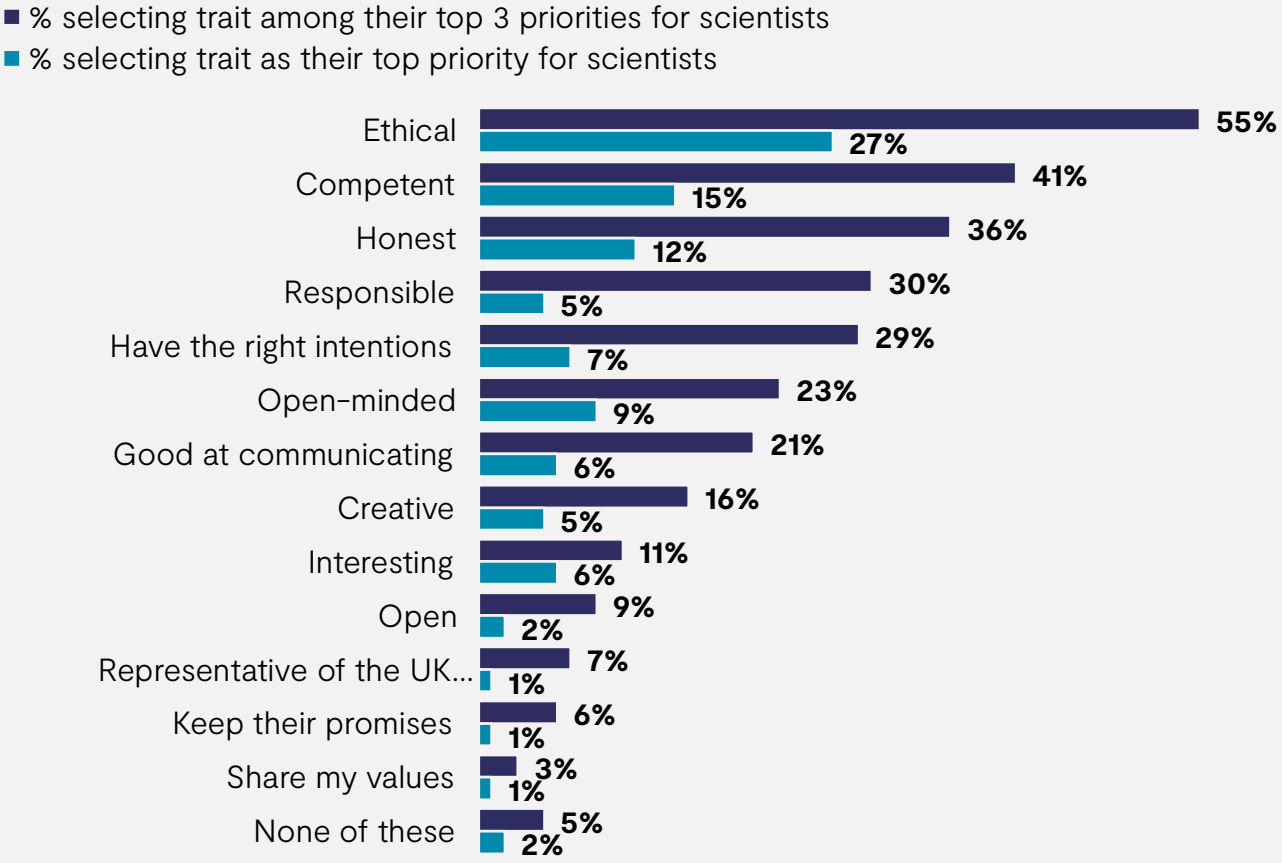
2.2 Traits associated with scientists

We asked people to rank from a list of words or phrases the top one to three traits they felt it was most important for scientists to have. In another question, we asked people whether scientists represent these traits or not. Similar questions were asked in the 2019 and 2014 surveys, but with a different list of answer options, so these cannot be directly compared.

As the chart below illustrates, ethical behaviour (55%), competence (41%) and honesty (36%) came across strongly among people's top three priorities. It is worth noting that behaving responsibly (which is similar to the ethical and responsible traits below), and being open and transparent (which is similar to honesty below), have been found in other Ipsos research to be important drivers of trust in brands or in governments. This suggests certain traits are not only important for scientists but are broader drivers of trust. By contrast, competency appears to be a trait more uniquely important for trust in scientists.

Traits associated with scientists

What are the top 3 traits the public feel are the most important for scientists to have?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

Women were more likely than men to put ethical behaviour, having the right intentions and being representative of the UK population as one of their top three priorities. By contrast, men were more likely than women to list open-mindedness among their top three priorities.

As the chart below shows, **a majority of the public associated scientists with positive traits**, such as being interesting (66%), creative (66%), competent (65%), well-intentioned (63%), open-minded (57%) and responsible (56%).

Traits associated with scientists

What positive/negative traits do the public most associate with scientists?

Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

The chart above also indicates many instances where people picked neither the positive nor the negative response, suggesting uncertainty in these areas. Notably, there was **a high level of uncertainty as to whether scientists were ethical** – 43% felt they were, but 44% said they were neither ethical nor unethical, or that it depended on the situation. This uncertainty was also high for keeping promises, shared values, communication and honesty. Again, further

investigation may be needed into what is behind this uncertainty. More outright negative opinions came through in the proportions saying scientists were unrepresentative (26%), secretive (26%) and poor at communicating (22%).

For wider context, the survey includes a further measure of ethical behaviour. This suggests that **the perception of scientists faking or adjusting results had become less prevalent**. In 2025, 24% agreed that scientists adjust their findings to get the answers they want, while 33% disagreed. Young people aged 16 to 24 were more likely to agree (31%, versus 24% overall). Over time, across the public, this sentiment has been declining (down from 36% agreeing in 2011, 35% in 2014, and 31% in 2019, to 24% in 2025).

2.3 Trust to follow rules and regulations

This section focuses on trust in scientists to follow rules and regulations, as well as parallel questions for researchers and engineers. We cover further data on trust in science information in Chapter 5.

Previous editions of PAS have shown that **trust in scientists, researchers and engineers is framed by the institutions they work for**. This continues to be the case. People had considerable trust that scientists follow rules and regulations that apply to them, when they work in universities (87% trusted them a great deal or fair amount), for charitable organisations (84%) or for environmental groups (77%). The majority also trusted scientists working for the government (69%) in this regard. Trust was much lower in scientists working for both pharmaceutical companies (60%) and other private companies (48%). There were similar differences by institution when these questions were asked of researchers or engineers.

Answers at these questions were broadly consistent with the 2019 survey, with two notable exceptions. **There was a drop in trust in:**

- scientists working for the government (down from 76% in 2019 to 69% in 2025)
- scientists working for private companies (down from 57% in 2019 to 48% in 2025).

These results cast a stark light on the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on trust. The Wellcome Global Monitor from 2020 suggests that, internationally, trust in scientists rose during the pandemic. By contrast, Ipsos' yearly Veracity Index has recorded a slight decline in trust in scientists in the UK post-pandemic, followed by a more recent recovery, but no long-term shift. And other Ipsos polling for UKRI undertaken during the pandemic flags how difficult it is to produce a long-term shift in trust.

> **Pandemic-era gains in trust in scientists were short-lived rather than deep-rooted**

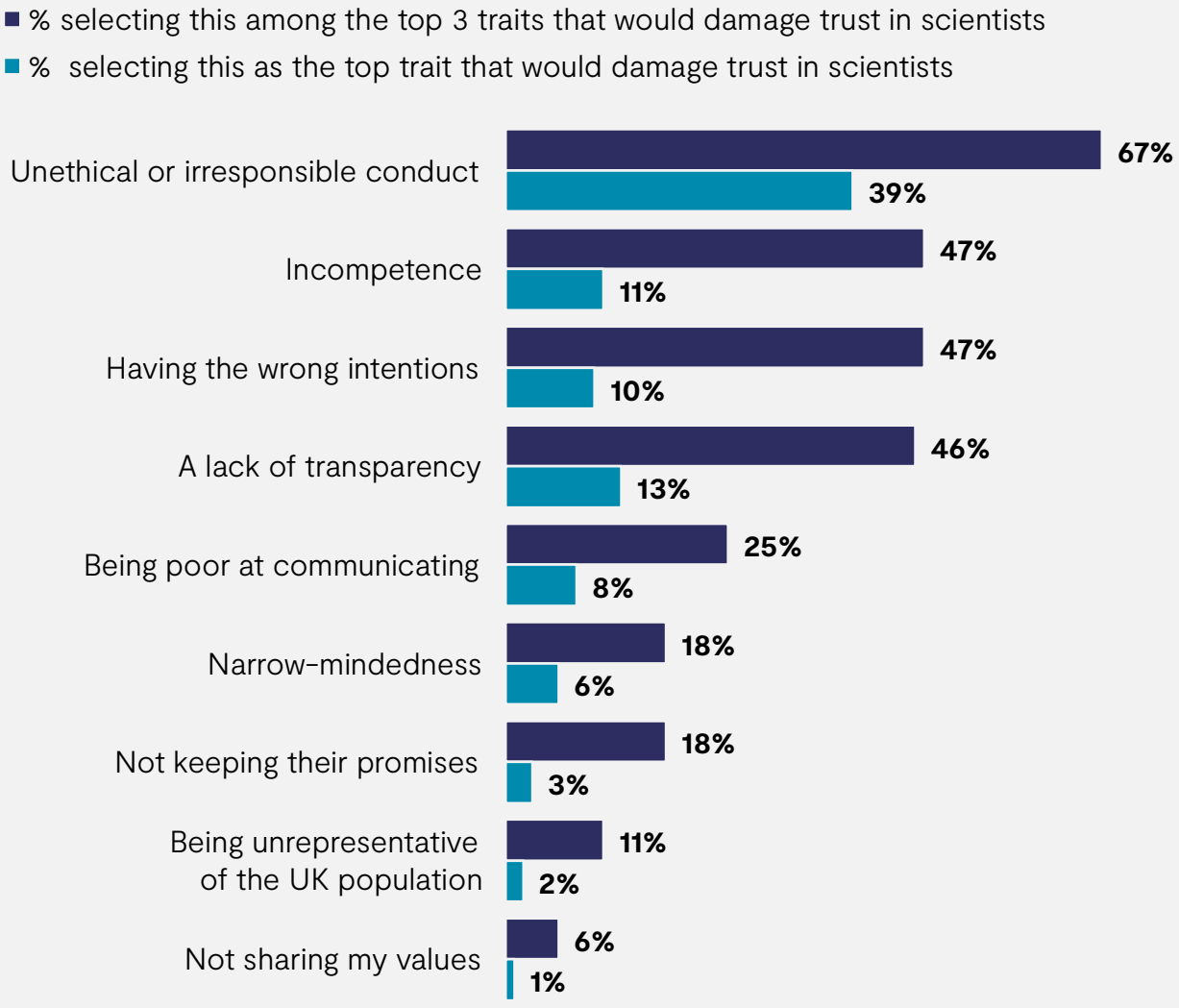
In the UK, PAS 2025 suggests that **pandemic-era gains in trust in scientists were short-lived rather than deep-rooted**. Moreover, they have been offset by growing concerns about scientists who work for government or private companies since the pandemic.

What would damage trust

People were asked what would be most likely to damage their trust in scientists. At this question, they were again asked to rank, from a list of words or phrases, the top one to three causes.

The answers here mirrored the question reported earlier in this chapter, on the traits people felt it was most important for scientists to represent. **Unethical or irresponsible conduct was the most frequently selected behaviour that people said would damage their trust**. The next most commonly chosen, but to a lesser extent, were incompetence, having the wrong intentions and a lack of transparency, as the following chart shows.

What would be most likely to damage the public's trust in scientists?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

Demographic differences

Once more, gender, age and science capital played a part in predicting who people trusted and why they trusted them:

- Women demonstrated higher trust than men in scientists from charitable organisations and environmental organisations. On the other hand, men were more likely than women to trust scientists working for private companies.
- Women were more inclined than men to identify unethical or irresponsible conduct as something that would damage their trust in scientists.
- A higher percentage of 16 to 24 year-olds than average selected scientists having the wrong intentions as one of the top three reasons for damaged trust.
- Individuals with high science capital (defined as those who had more interactions with science in their daily lives) tended to exhibit higher trust in scientists, researchers and engineers regardless of where they worked.

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 3

The application of science

3 The application of science

This chapter examines awareness and attitudes towards existing and emerging technologies, applications and processes of science. This includes general attitudes toward technology and its regulation, as well as attitudes to specific science and technology topics. The latter includes areas that have long been covered in this survey series, such as the use of animals in research, as well as fast-evolving and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI).

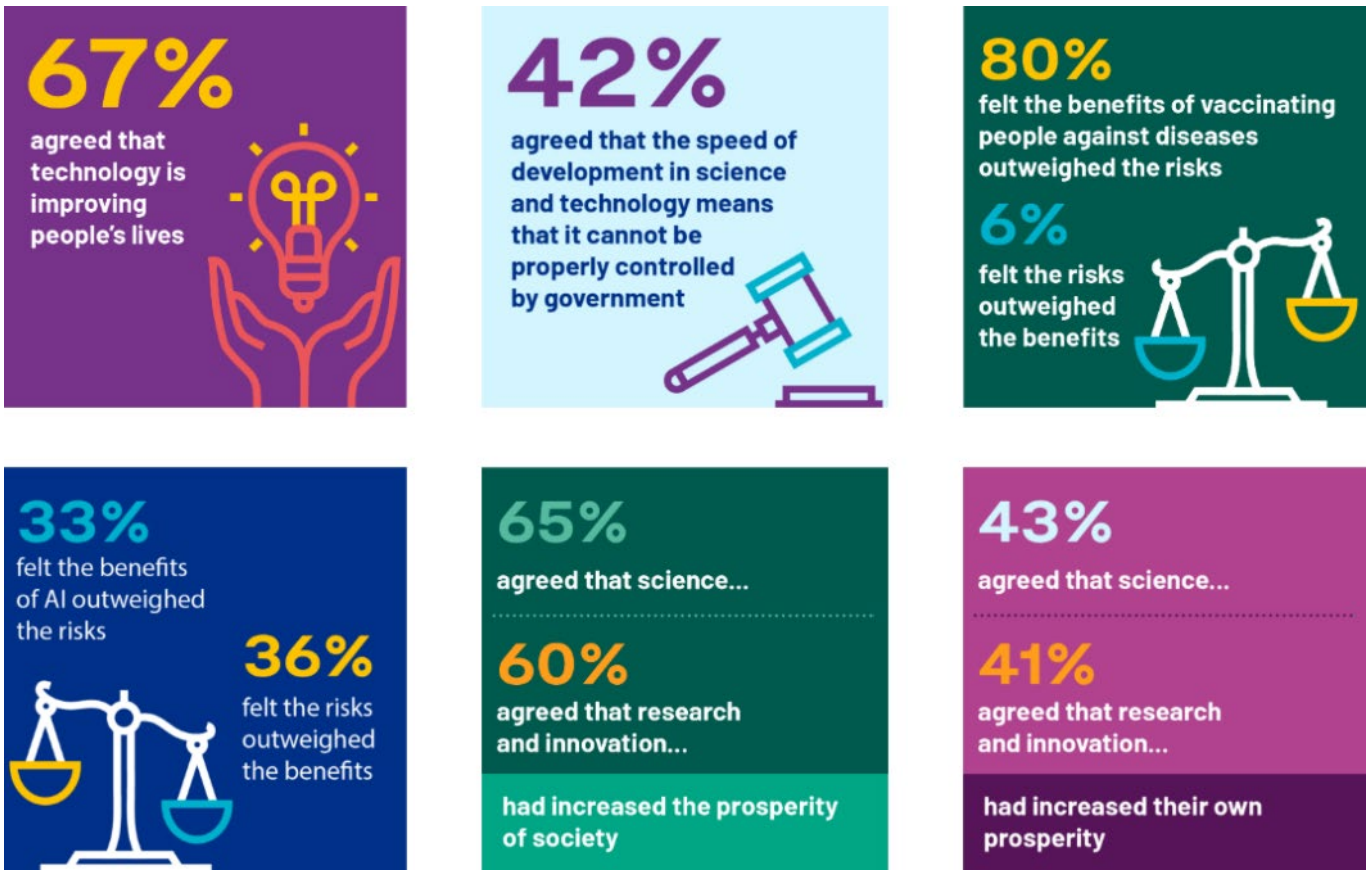
The overall story

Two-thirds of the public agreed that technology enhances people's lives. However, since 2019, **concerns have grown about the extent to which scientists appropriately consider the risks associated with new technologies**. AI joins the group of technologies, applications and processes which polarised public opinion, alongside traditional areas of concern such as genetically modified (GM) crops and the use of animals in medical research.

There was **a disconnect between scientific progress, and personal prosperity**. While over three-fifths agreed science made a direct contribution to the UK's economic growth and had increased the prosperity of society as a whole, only two-fifths felt it had increased their personal prosperity.

In addition, **people were unclear about how science was contributing to big societal challenges**. People felt more informed about science's contributions to improving the NHS, and to making the UK a world leader in clean energy, but less so about its impact on childcare and education, economic growth, and crime reduction. However, in each of these five areas, only a minority of the public felt informed. Despite this, there was **strong public backing for the government to invest in science, research, and innovation**, and for science to contribute to each of these areas.

The headlines



3.1 The development of science and technology

Dealing with technological change

PAS showcases **a UK public that largely embraces new technology**. In a new question, two-thirds (67%) agreed that, on the whole, new technology is improving our lives. Just one in nine (11%) disagreed.

Nonetheless, **a sizable minority of the public had concerns about the risks of new technologies in general, and the government's ability to manage the risks**. While just over half (55%) were confident that scientists in the UK have thoroughly considered the risks of new technologies before they are used, three in ten (31%) were not confident. In addition, nearly twice as many people agreed than disagreed that the speed of development in science and technology means that they cannot be properly controlled by government (42% vs. 22%).

> **A sizable minority of the public had concerns about the risks of new technologies in general, and the government's ability to manage the risks**

These concerns are not wholly new. Roughly the same proportion have voiced concerns about the government's ability to control new developments in science and technology in every survey since 2000 (when this was first asked). Concern has not risen, despite significant technological developments affecting people's daily lives (for example, in AI) in recent years.

However, **confidence in scientists thoroughly considering the risks of new technologies has decreased since 2019** (from 69% to 55% confident that scientists have done so).

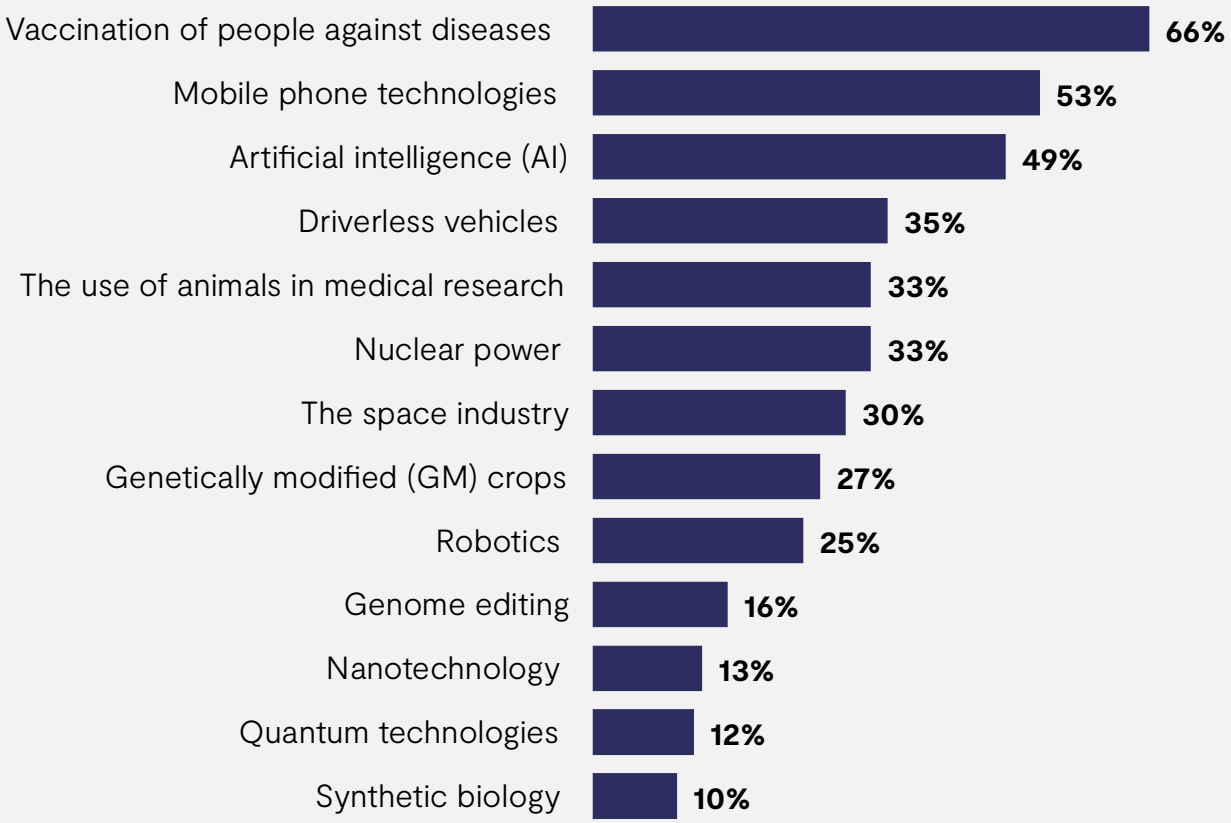
Demographic differences were similar to those seen in other areas of the survey. Men, graduates and people with high science capital (those more connected to science in their daily lives), were more positive about technological change. Interestingly, bucking this trend, **individuals with high science capital were more likely to express concern about the government's ability to manage the risks of new science and technology** – half (49%) agreed this cannot be properly controlled by government, compared with 35% of those with low science capital.

Perceptions of specific technologies, applications and processes

Chapter 1 covered the finding that 43% of people felt informed about science overall. The PAS studies have always included additional questions asking how informed people felt about specific topic areas, shown in the chart below.

There were a range of highly salient topic areas in this list, such as vaccination, mobile technologies and AI. By contrast, at the bottom of this list were technologies, applications and processes that very few felt informed on, such as genome editing, nanotechnology, quantum technologies and synthetic biology.

% that feel informed about...



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

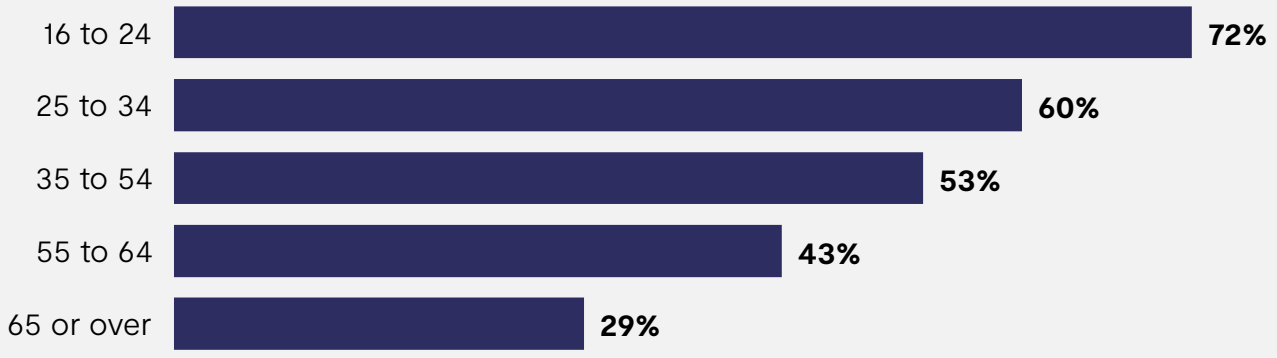
Due to changes in question wording, not all these topics can be tracked over time, including AI. However, one area that has shifted is vaccinations. Despite the highly publicised coverage of the COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic, **the proportion of people feeling informed about vaccination has consistently fallen** (from 77% in 2014, to 71% in 2019, and 66% in 2025).

The proportion of people feeling informed about vaccination has consistently fallen

Men, younger people aged 16 to 24, and graduates were typically more likely to feel informed about each of the technologies listed. However, there were exceptions, which potentially reflected levels of exposure. Women were more likely than men to feel informed about vaccination programmes and the use of animals in research. Older people aged 65 or over were also more likely to feel informed about the vaccination of people than young people.

AI was a particular topic area where information levels varied considerably by age group, as the following chart shows. The majority of women also felt uninformed about AI (55% not very or not at all informed, versus 40% of men).

% feeling very/fairly informed about artificial intelligence (AI) by age group



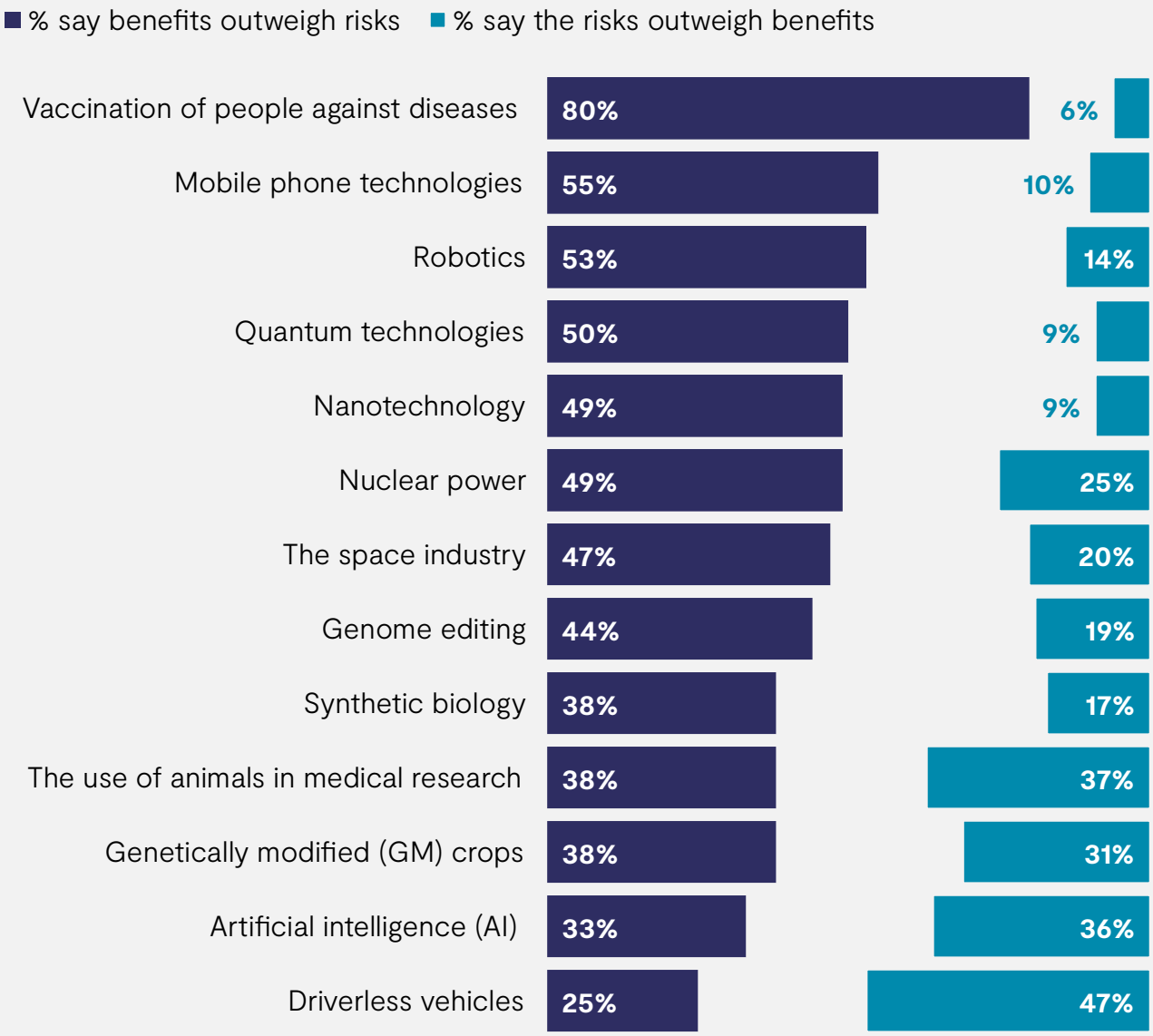
Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

The survey also covers the perceived risks versus benefits of each of these technologies, applications or processes to understand where public concerns may lie. It is important to note that these questions were only asked of people who felt informed, at least to some extent, about each topic (excluding those saying “not at all informed”).

The chart below highlights the overwhelmingly positive views towards vaccination, with a small proportion who were sceptical. At the same time, several topics were considerably more polarising, including animal research, GM crops, AI and driverless vehicles.

The development of science and technology

Perceived risks versus benefits of each of these technologies, applications or processes



Base (per bar): c.2,000+ who felt informed at least to some extent about each respective technology, application or process

As well as feeling more informed on each of these topics, men, graduates, and people with high science capital were, in general, more likely than average to emphasise benefits, rather than risks, from the various technologies, applications and processes asked about.

Looking across the questions on awareness and attitudes, on certain issues there is a link between awareness and favourability. For instance, the UK public felt relatively well informed about vaccinations and mobile phone technologies, which they also viewed positively. AI bucks this trend, being a divisive topic despite people feeling relatively well informed about it. This suggests that there is not simply a fear of the unknown underpinning people's concerns. Moreover, **making people feel more informed about AI or other controversial technologies may not, on its own, build public trust or allay concerns**.

3.2 Science's contribution to society and the economy

Growing the economy

A clear majority of people agreed that science made a direct contribution to economic growth (64%). Just 5% disagreed with this sentiment, and 29% neither agreed nor disagreed. For the first time, a similar question was also asked with regards to research and innovation. A higher proportion (69%) agreed that research and innovation contributed directly to economic growth. The higher agreement may reflect the greater association with technology and tools attached to "research and innovation" versus "science", covered previously in Chapter 1.

A clear majority of people agreed that science made a direct contribution to economic growth

However, **belief in the economic value of science has dropped since 2019** (when 75% agreed), having been relatively stable since 2011. This drop was accompanied by more people neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Dealing with major societal challenges and issues

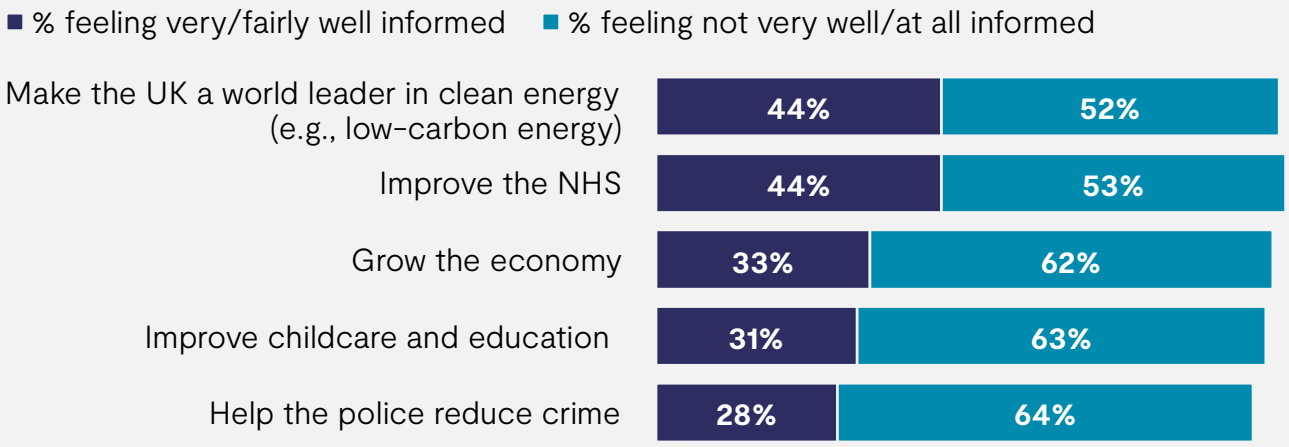
The less positive attitudes around science's contribution to economic growth may be because people feel uninformed about how it contributes. A new series of questions explored how informed people felt about science's contributions to big societal issues – all shown in the next chart. The categories were chosen based on the government's long-term missions (although we did not explicitly mention this in the survey). These questions were framed broadly, to cover "science, research and innovation" together.

The public believed that the government should invest in science to improve the NHS and education

The notion that science has a part to play in broader aspects of society and public policy might have been too abstract for most people. For each of the five areas covered, most of the public did not feel informed. Furthermore, there was a clear split – far fewer people felt informed about how science contributed to economic growth, improvements to childcare and education, and crime reduction, than to cleaner energy or a better NHS.

Science's contribution to society and the economy

How informed the public feel about science's contributions to big societal issues

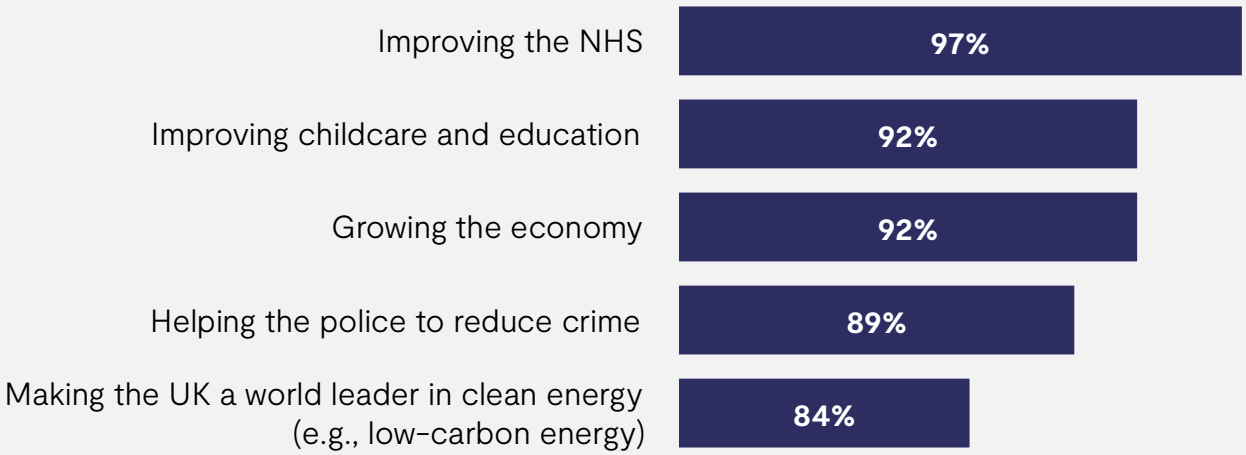


Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. the chart excludes "don't know" responses

In line with the patterns seen throughout this report, men, those educated to degree level or higher, and people with high science capital (those with more connections to science or scientists in their everyday lives) were more likely to feel informed about most of these topics. However, there were exceptions, possibly reflecting relative exposure to each of these areas. For example, women were more likely than men to feel informed about the contribution science had on improving childcare and education (34% versus 27%).

The survey also asked the public how important it was for the government to invest in science, research and innovation to improve each of these five areas. **In each area, there was a near-universal public desire for government investment, which cut across all demographic groups**.

% saying it is important for the UK government to invest in science, research and innovation in...



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

Drawing on other findings from elsewhere in the PAS data, we see that most people (73%) acknowledged the effect human activity can have on the climate. Those who shared this sentiment were, perhaps unsurprisingly, more likely to think it was important for the government to invest in science, research, and innovation that would help make Britain a world leader in clean energy.

Personal versus societal prosperity

New questions for 2025 suggest that **people were more likely to see science as benefitting society at large, rather than their own personal prosperity**. Around two-thirds (65%) felt that science had increased the prosperity of society. In comparison, only two in five (43%) agreed that science had increased their own personal prosperity. Parallel questions were also asked about "research and innovation" as opposed to "science", and these garnered very similar responses.

Around half (54%) agreed that science had improved the quality of public services in the UK – also a new question. One in nine (11%) disagreed, while a third (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed – with the neutral response being strongest among those who felt less informed about science in general. Similar opinions were noted for research and innovation, as well as science.

Graduates were more likely than average to agree that science had increased their personal prosperity. However, there were splits within this group – 75% of science and engineering graduates agreed, compared with 53% of graduates from the social sciences and 48% from arts and humanities subjects.

People living in London were also more likely than average to agree that science had increased their personal prosperity (52%, versus 43% overall). Perhaps less surprisingly, this attitude was also linked to financial hardship – those who answered in another survey question that they were finding it difficult to live on their present income were less likely than others to agree that science had increased their personal prosperity (32% agreed, versus 43% overall).

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 4

Responsible science

4 Responsible science

Responsible science is characterised by its commitment to ethical and sustainable research. It emphasises active engagement with the public and independence from external influences.

This chapter starts by looking at the perceived independence of science, particularly in terms of how it is governed and funded. It then covers the actions of scientists and regulators, and how effectively they are seen to communicate with the public. Finally, it looks at the perceived interactions between science, the government and policymaking.

The overall story

This latest survey reinforces many messages around responsible science from previous years. **There was broad support for scientists and those that regulate them to communicate more with the public**. And clear majorities still felt the government should act in accordance with public concerns around science and technology, and that experts should play an important role in advising the government on scientific developments.

> **There was broad support for scientists and those that regulate them to communicate more with the public**

However, people remained **worried about the independence of scientists being eroded by funders, government and industry**. Moreover, they appeared less willing than in 2019 to place their trust in those governing and regulating science and wanted scientists and the public to have a greater hand in regulation. A potential explanatory factor behind these attitudes is the public's understanding of science funding and regulation. The government and private companies were viewed as the top funders of scientific research. And more people thought that funders, government ministers and private companies were in charge of setting the rules and regulations for scientists, than thought that these groups should be in charge. In other words, **people were predisposed to think that government and industry had power and influence over scientists**.

Nevertheless, fewer people were raising concerns around a lack of independence and communication in 2025 than before. This may be driven by the **differences between younger and older generations**. Compared to the average, young adults aged 16 to 24 tended to place less importance on the independence of scientists, were more likely to disagree that scientists should discuss the social and ethical implications of their work, were less likely to say that those who regulate science should communicate with the public and were more neutral about experts advising the government on science issues.

> **People remained worried about the independence of scientists being eroded by funders, government and industry**

The headlines

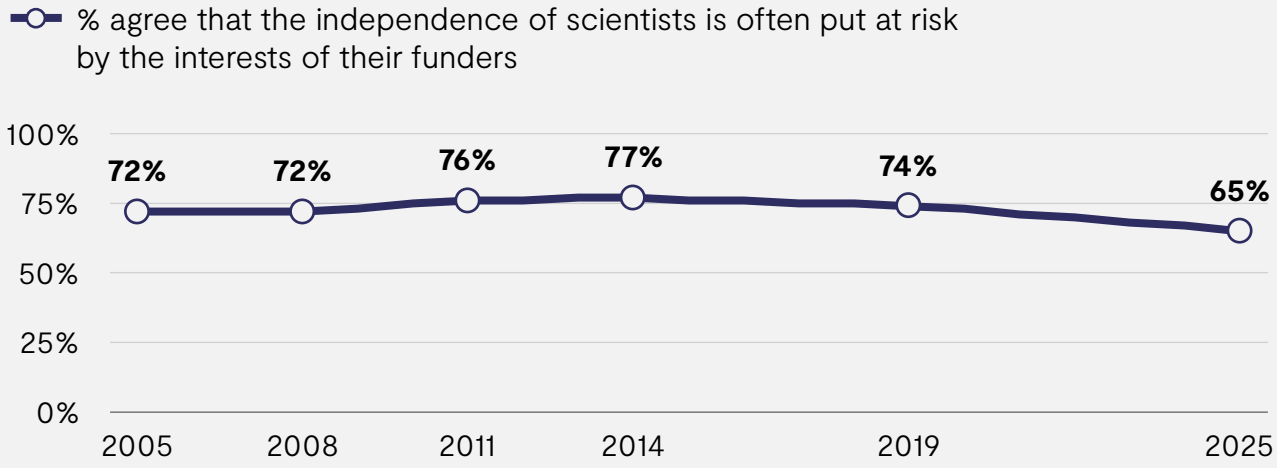
4.1 The perceived independence of scientists

Two questions in the survey **highlight how strongly the public valued and were concerned about scientific independence**. Eight in ten (82%) agreed it is important to have some scientists who are not linked to business. Furthermore, around two-thirds (65%) agreed that the independence of scientists is often put at risk by the interests of their funders. Those who felt informed about science were more likely than average to agree with both sentiments.

This remained an important issue for the public, although it is worth noting that concern about scientific independence being compromised by funders has dropped to its lowest level since the question was first asked (in 2005). This is shown in the chart below.

The public valued scientific independence but were concerned about it being put at risk

The perceived independence of scientists



Base: 2,480 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

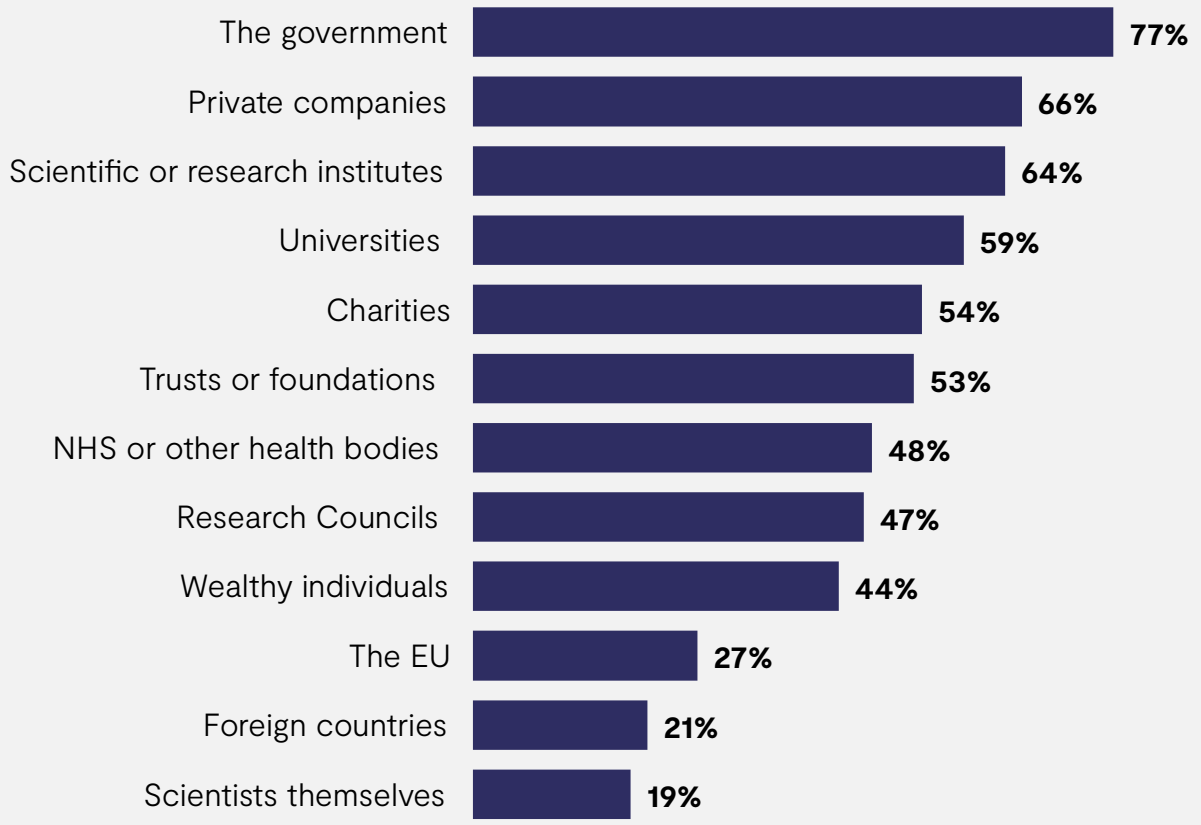
4.2 Funding science

The private sector is the largest funder of scientific research in the UK. Evidence of this comes from Office for National Statistics data looking at research and development spending, which shows that the largest funder is the private sector followed by the higher education sector, then government directly, then charities.

PAS has historically found that **people overestimate the level of government funding of scientific research in the UK**. This year's study is no exception, although the questions asked this year are not directly comparable to previous years.

The prompted list of responses to the question of who funds scientific research in the UK is shown in the chart below. The top response by far was the government. The chart also highlights the relatively basic awareness and understanding that the public had about the role of publicly funded institutions such as the Research Councils (included on the prompted list, but without a further explanation for those completing the survey). It also shows that **other jurisdictions, such as the EU and other countries, were more rarely felt to play a role in UK scientific research**.

% saying this institution or group funds scientific research in the UK



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

4.3 Rules and regulations

The perceived power held by those setting the rules and regulations around science is encapsulated in a longstanding question, dating back to 2005, shown in the chart below.

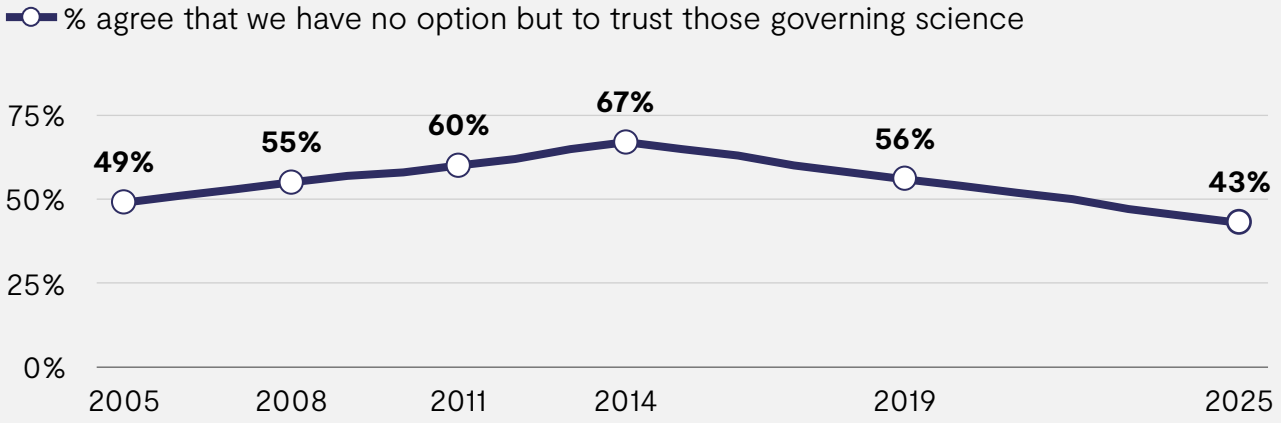
In 2025, just over two-fifths (43%) agreed that people have no option but to trust those governing science, while a quarter (25%) disagreed. This has declined since its peak in 2014.

> **The public may have become less willing to take science governance and regulation for granted**

This is a complex statement to disentangle, but the shift **may suggest that the public has become less willing to take science governance and regulation for granted**.

Trust in those governing science

Do the public believe we have any option but to trust those governing science?



Base: 2,480 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

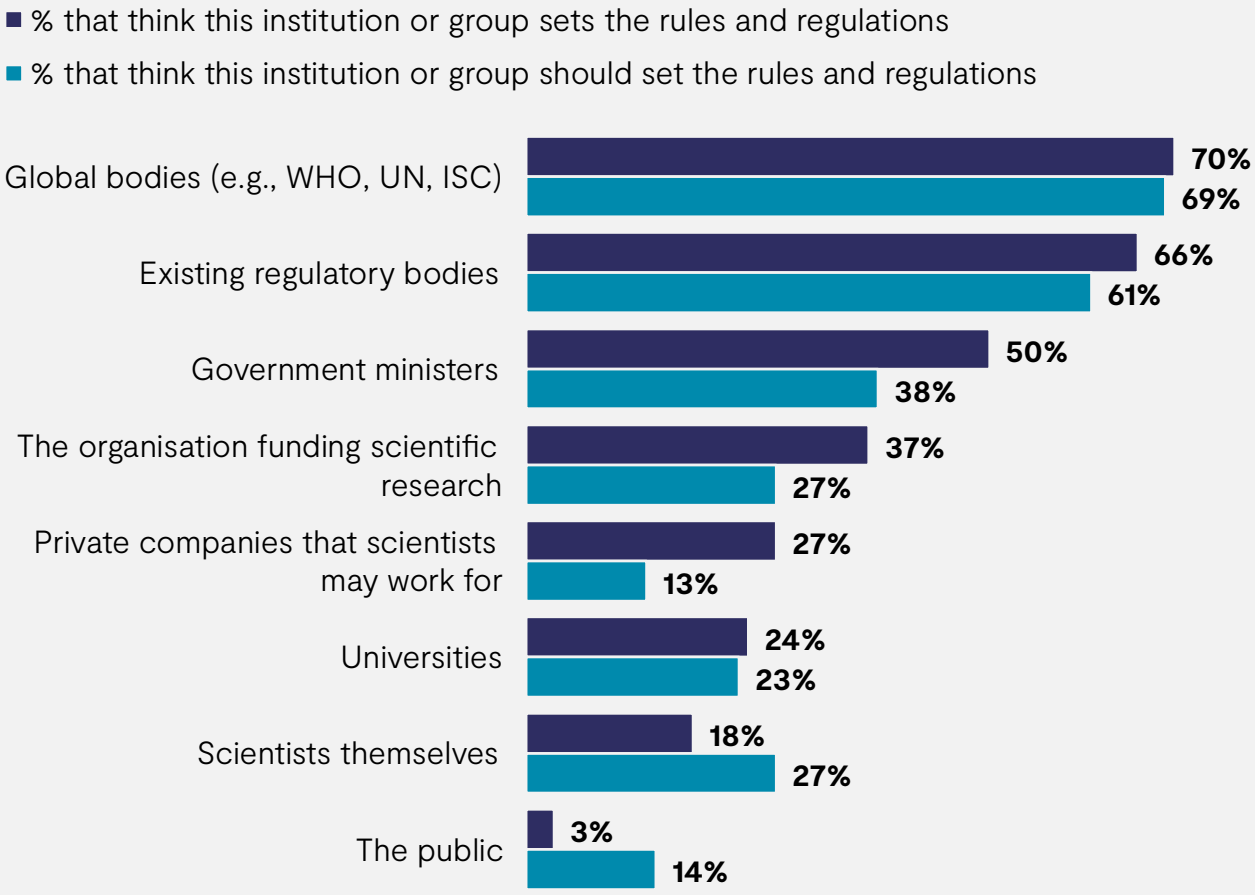
The following chart shows who the public currently thought set the rules and regulations for scientists to follow, as well as who they thought should be doing so. This highlights the major role that many felt that global institutions played, and ought to play, in regulating scientists. It also illustrates public concerns around the perceived influence of government ministers, private companies and the funders of scientific research.

As noted in the previous section, the funding of scientific research in the UK was most commonly attributed to the government and to private companies. Moreover, Chapter 2 reported that scientists working for private companies and for government were the least trusted group of scientists.

At the same time, the chart below shows that **more people wanted scientists themselves and the public to have a hand in regulation, than felt were currently involved**.

Rules and regulations

Who do the public currently think set the rules and regulations for scientists to follow, and who do they think should be doing so?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

While similar questions were asked in previous years, these were unprompted (which was not possible this time due to the PAS survey moving online and being asked on a screen). As such, this data is not directly comparable with previous years.

Three small but significant subgroup differences emerged at these questions:

- Those with high science capital, i.e., those who interacted more with science and scientists as part of their daily lives, were more likely than average to say that scientists themselves should be involved in setting the rules and regulations.
- There was a contrast between under-55s and those aged 55 or higher – the former were more likely to want the public to be involved in setting rules and regulations.
- People from Asian ethnic backgrounds were also more likely than average to want the public to be involved.

4.4 Communicating with the public

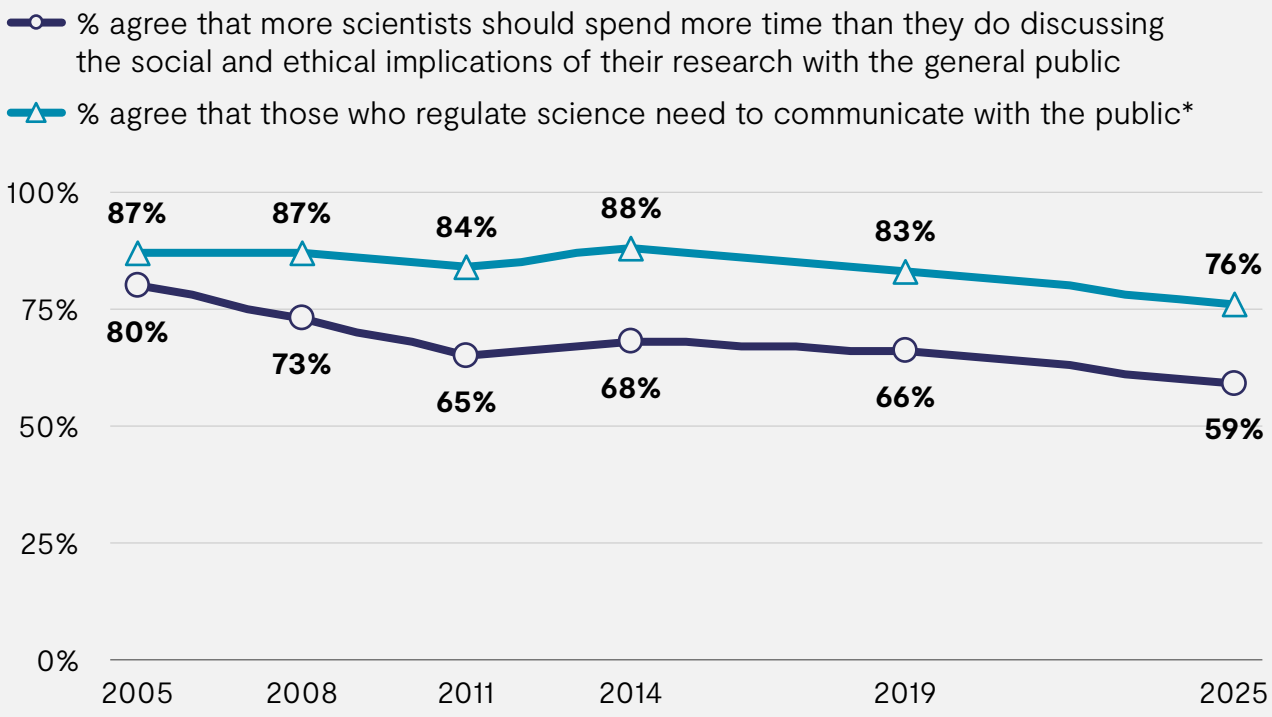
A majority of the public wanted regulators and scientists to be communicating with the public. There was also majority agreement, albeit to a lesser extent, that scientists should be rewarded for this kind of science communication work.

- 76% agreed that those who regulate science need to communicate with the public. This sentiment was, however, less strong among young people aged 16 to 24 (63% agreed).
- 59% agreed that they would like more scientists to spend more time discussing the social and ethical implications of their research with the public – a statement that resonated similarly across genders and age groups.
- 56% agreed that scientists should be rewarded for communicating their research to the public.

Those with high science capital – who had more regular interaction with science and scientists in their daily lives – were more supportive of communication from scientists and regulators, and of rewarding those who communicate their research.

The above sentiments reflected a majority of the public. However, **the proportions that wanted regulators to communicate with the public, and scientists to spend more time discussing social and ethical implications, have both fallen since 2019**, as shown in the following chart. This was not because more people disagreed with these statements in 2025. Instead, it reflects an increase in the proportion who neither agreed nor disagreed.

Communicating with the public



Base: 2,480 (or 2,616*) UK adults aged 16 and over
*N.B. these questions were asked to a random half of the full sample

These findings contrast with Chapter 2, where we reported that ethical conduct was a driver of trust. The rising ambivalence towards science communication in this latest survey (i.e., increasing proportions neither agreeing nor disagreeing) highlights the considerable challenge that scientists and regulators face in influencing trust.

4.5 Science in government and policymaking

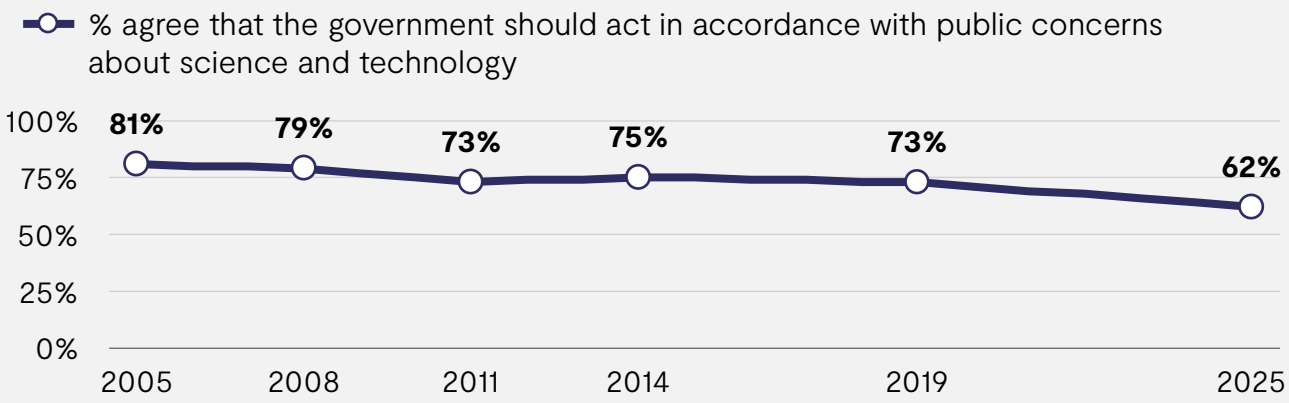
Several questions reflected **people's wishes for public concerns about science to be reflected in policymaking** and **a desire for the government to involve the relevant experts to shape science policy**. However, there was a great deal of uncertainty around whether and how this might be happening already.

- 62% agreed that the government should act in accordance with public concerns about science (a broad statement, not attributable to any single science topic or policy area).
- 62% also agreed that experts, not the public, should advise the government about the implications of scientific developments. Young people aged 16 to 24 were less likely to agree (54%).
- 25% agreed that government ministers regularly use science to inform decision-making, whereas 28% disagreed, and the biggest proportion (43%) neither agreed nor disagreed – this was a new question for 2025.

The majority felt that the government should act in accordance with public concerns about science. However, this sentiment has waned since 2019, dipping even more sharply from its peak in 2005, as illustrated in the chart below. There were more people neither agreeing nor disagreeing than before, which follows a broader pattern seen across questions.

Public concern about science and technology

Should the government act in accordance with public concerns about science and technology?



Base: 2,480 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

A new question was added in 2025 to explore whether the views of the public and the views of experts should be jointly considered when making decisions around science. Just under half (46%) agreed with this approach. However, a sizeable minority (21%) disagreed, highlighting the more contentious nature of experts and the public getting an equal say. Young people aged 16 to 24 were more likely to disagree than older people aged 65 and above (26% versus 15%). Those with high science capital – more connected to science and scientists through their everyday lives – were also more likely than average to disagree (34%, compared to 21% overall).

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 5

Consumption of science

5 Consumption of science

This chapter delves into how and where people consume information and news about science. This includes a small number of questions repeated from previous editions of PAS, about the volume of information, trust in information, conflicting information and the media's treatment of science. It also includes a large set of new questions for 2025, covering how people were both actively seeking out information about science, and passively coming across it. These questions provide new insights into the information sources that people use and trust.

The overall story

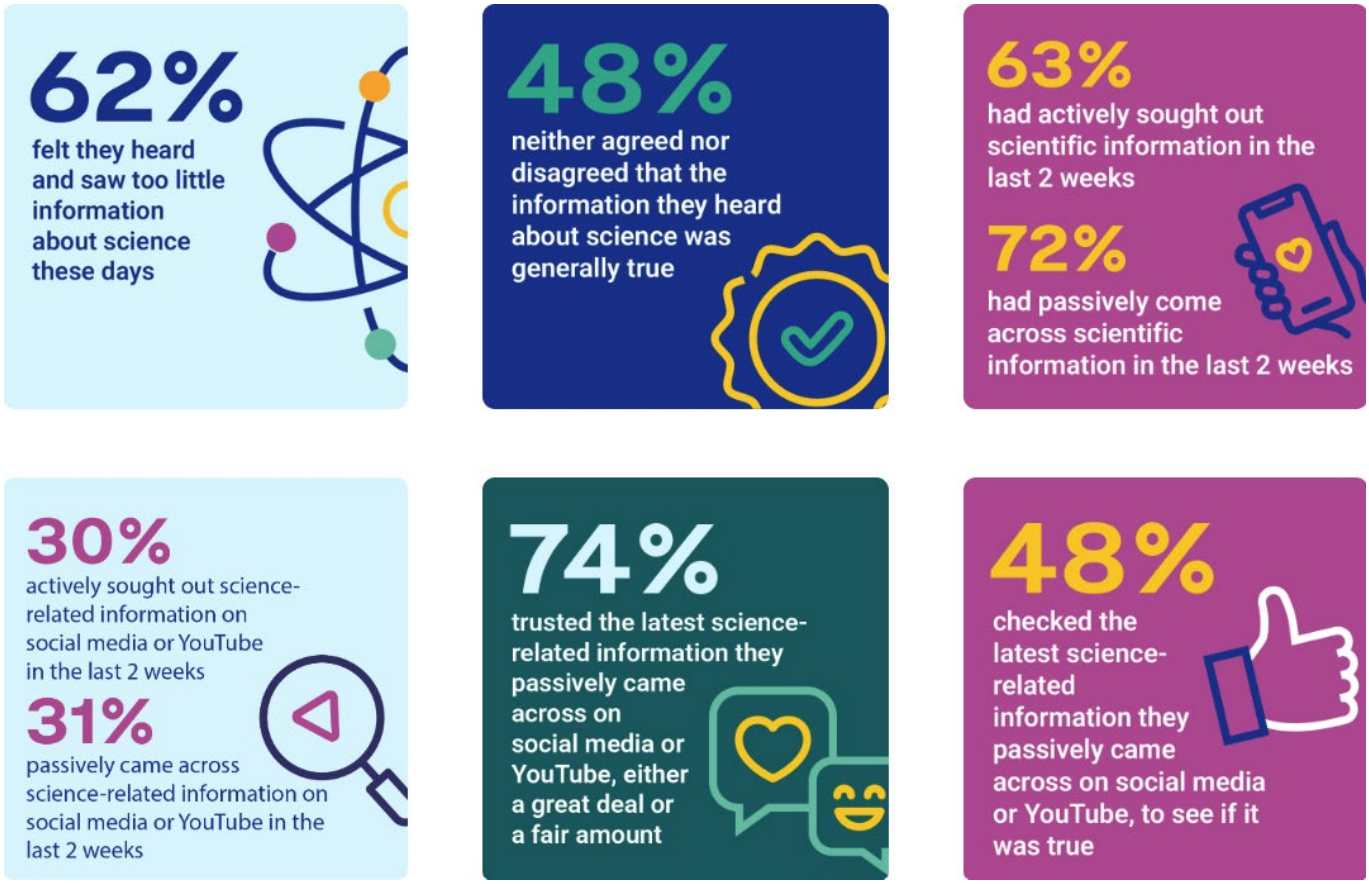
In an evolving digital landscape, **new media, encompassing social media platforms and YouTube, has become one of the main ways to access information on science.** Moreover, **among 16 to 24 year-olds, new media surpassed traditional media** – TV, radio, and newspapers or magazines – as the most frequent source of information about science.

> **New media, encompassing social media and YouTube, has become one of the main ways to access information on science**

While the overwhelming majority of those who sought information on science said it was easy to find and understand, the proliferation of information sources has not led to an increase in trust. **There was an increasing desire to see or hear more about science** compared to previous years. However, **people were also more uncertain than before whether the information they heard about science was true**.

Some results reflected the challenges of media polarisation, misinformation and disinformation. There were fewer concerns around media sensationalism, or conflicting information on science, than in any previous PAS survey – which **may indicate more people self-curating their news and information sources, or having them pre-filtered by algorithms**. People were **equally likely to say they trusted information they had sought, regardless of whether it was on traditional media, new media, or through friends, family and colleagues (including WhatsApp)**. Moreover, trust was often not based on people checking findings for themselves. Instead, people said it was more commonly based in their confidence in processes, sources and institutions.

The headlines



5.1 Do people hear too much or too little?

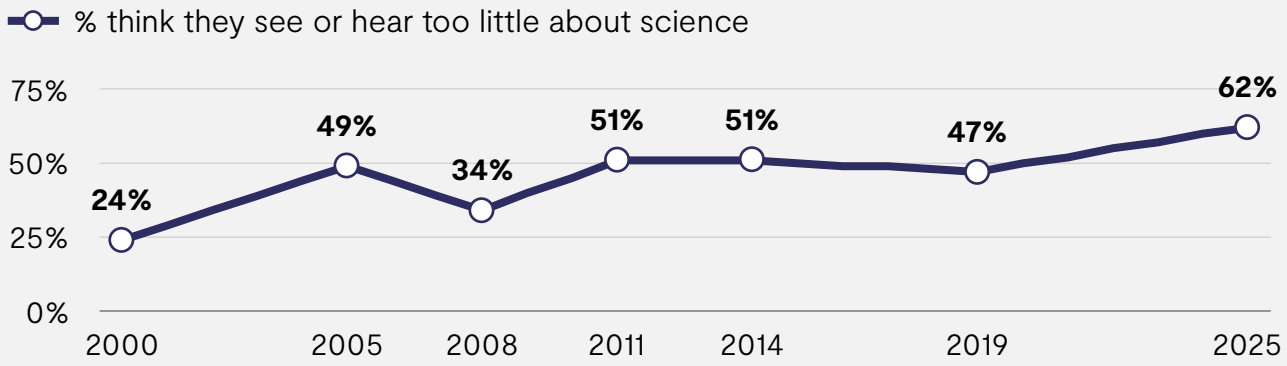
As context for the rest of this chapter, this section covers a longstanding question from PAS on the volume of information about science. **There was a clear desire for more information about science.** Three-fifths (62%) said they saw or heard too little information, while three in ten (31%) felt that they encountered the right amount, and just 5% felt they saw or heard too much.

As the chart below shows, **this desire for more information has reached its highest level in the last 25 years**. As Chapter 4 shows, this does not necessarily mean that people want to hear more from regulators, or from scientists about ethics, but it reflects a more general interest. It also aligns with fewer people feeling informed about science than in 2019 (covered in Chapter 1).

This desire for more information has reached its highest level in the last 25 years

Do people hear too much or too little?

How do the public feel about the volume of information they receive about science?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

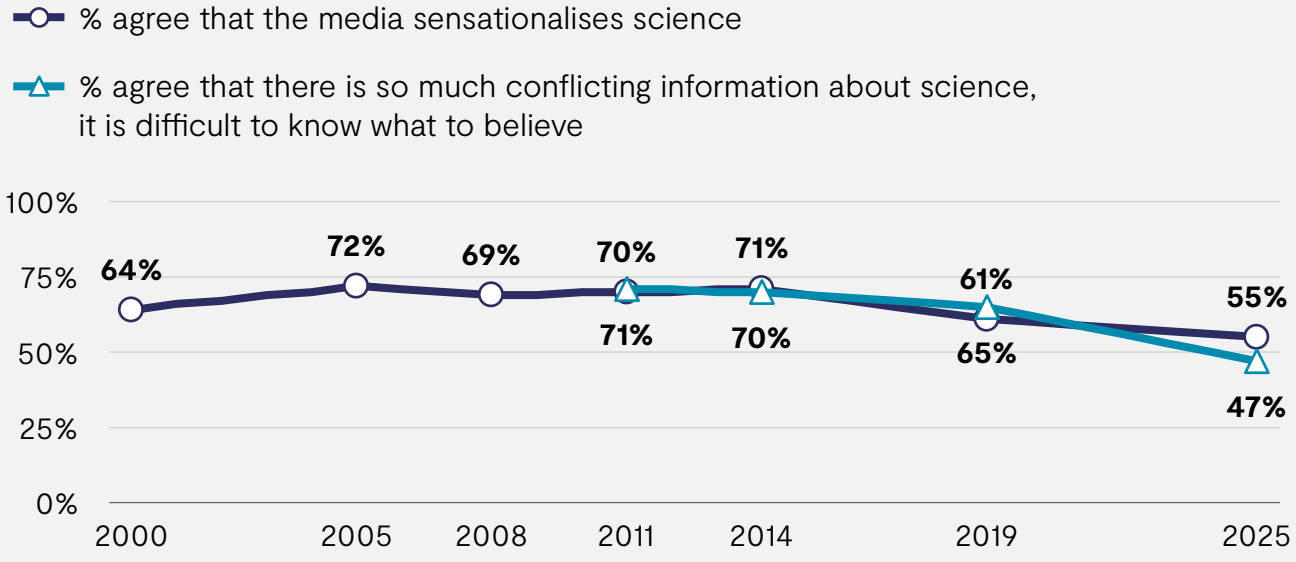
Those that did not feel informed about science (covered in Chapter 1) were more likely to agree they saw and heard too little about it. In addition, the 25 to 34 age group was more likely than average to report seeing and hearing too little information.

5.2 The quality and reliability of information

Two regular questions in PAS have looked at the perceived quality and reliability of information on science available to the public. The latest data suggests that **quality and reliability remain concerns, but these concerns have diminished over time**. As the following chart shows, around half (47%) agreed that there is so much conflicting information about science, it is difficult to know what to believe. And just over half (55%) believed the media sensationalises science. Both statistics have dropped from their peaks in earlier years.

The quality and reliability of information

The perceived quality and reliability of information on science available to the public



Base: 2,616 UK adults age 16 or over

Looking at the drop in perceived media sensationalism, one explanation may be the move away from science being accessed through traditional "media" (i.e., TV, radio, newspapers and magazines), and more towards new media. This is covered in later sections of this chapter. Additionally, one explanation for the drop in concern about conflicting information in science could be increasing media polarisation and the rise of filter bubbles. That is, people increasingly self-curating their sources of news and information, or having information filtered for them through search algorithms. However, further research would be needed to more directly make these links.

Women were more likely than men to agree that there was conflicting information, but less likely to agree that the media sensationalises science. Young people aged 16 to 24 were also less likely than average to agree that the media sensationalises science.

5.3 How and where do people find information on science?

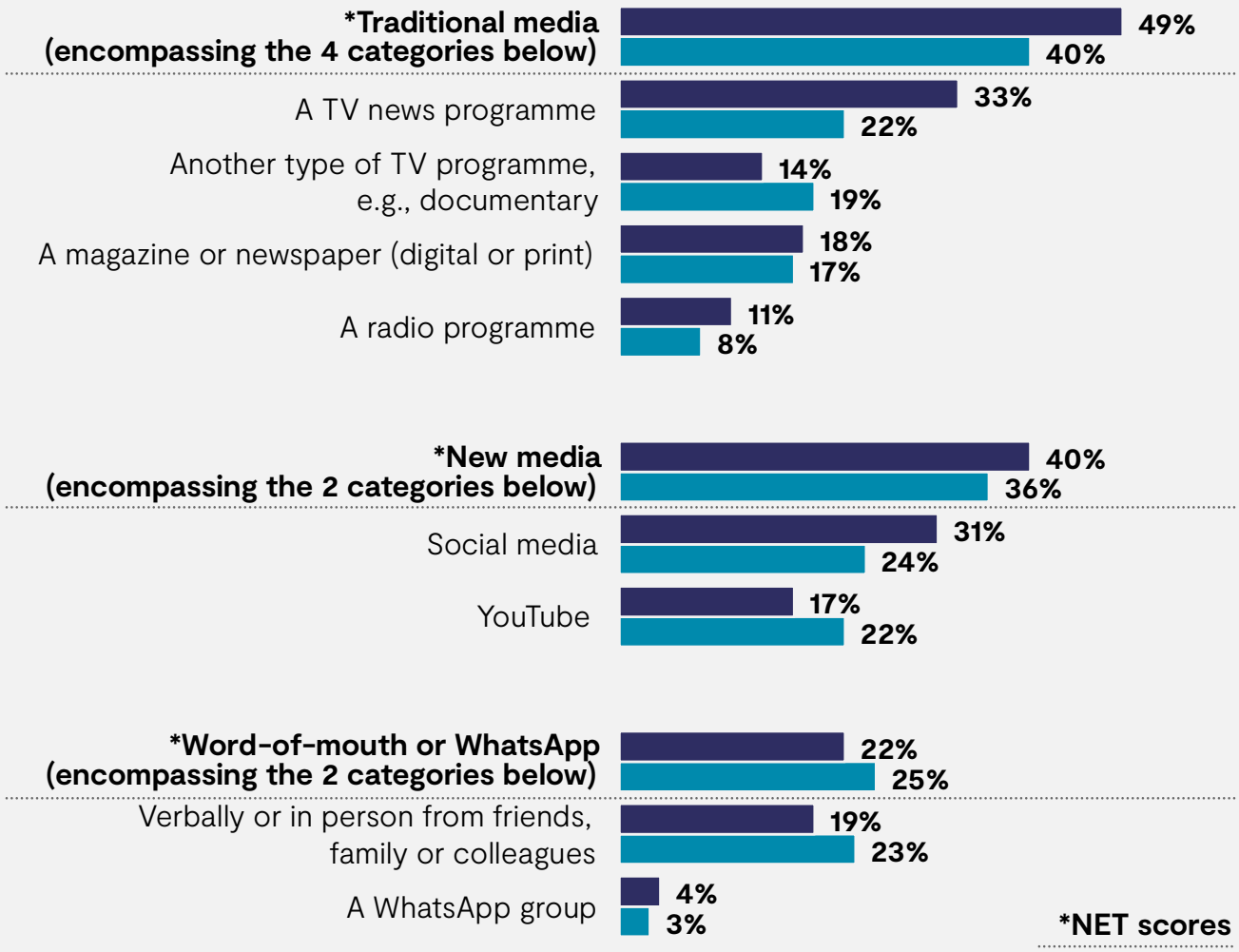
The remainder of this chapter largely focuses on new questions for 2025. These delve more deeply into how people access information on science. We asked where people had either actively sought out such information, or passively come across it, in the two weeks before completing the survey. Science-related information was not defined but left up to those taking part to self-report.

The chart below provides several insights on this:

- When grouped together, traditional media sources such as TV, radio, newspapers and magazines, remained the most common platforms for passively seeking out information about science. However, **new media (including social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and X – formerly known as Twitter – as well as YouTube) was on a par with traditional media as a place to actively seek information on science**.
- Social media (excluding YouTube) was more commonly used for passive engagement rather than active information seeking.
- People were more likely to actively seek out information through certain sources, than to passively come across it. These included non-news TV programmes (e.g., documentaries), newspapers or magazines, and YouTube.

How and where do people find information on science

Where have people either actively sought out information, or passively come across it, in the two weeks before completing the survey?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

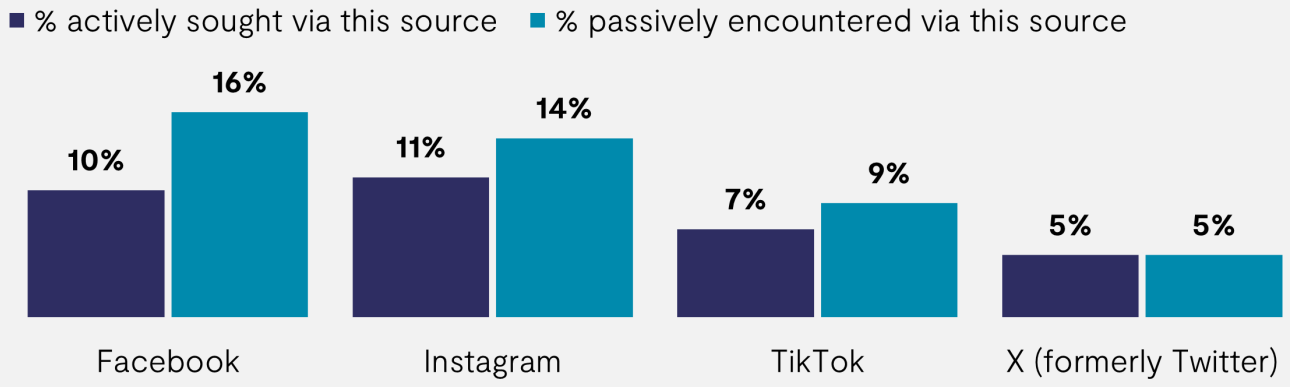
The overall statistics in the chart above mask important differences by age. **A majority of young people aged 16 to 24 had come across science-related information on new media sources in the previous two weeks**, either passively (59%) or by actively seeking it out (55%). These sources far surpassed traditional media for this age group.

5.4 Social media platforms

Access to science-related information on social media was dominated by four platforms – Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) – as the following chart shows. Other specific platforms (e.g., Snapchat, WeChat, Bluesky, LinkedIn and Telegram) were included in this question but were much less commonly mentioned.

Social media platforms

What social media platforms have people used to actively seek out science-related information, or passively come across it, in the last 2 weeks?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over

TikTok and Instagram rated considerably higher among young people aged 16 to 24. For example, for this age group, 31% had passively come across science-related information on TikTok, and 27% had come across such information on Instagram.

5.5 Perceived value and use of the information found

People were more likely to share or discuss science-related information if they had been actively seeking it out rather than if they passively came across it (68% versus 54%). Similarly, they were more likely to have sought out further information on the same topic if they had been actively looking, compared to passively encountering it (54% versus 34%). These findings also highlight that it was more common for people to share science-related information than to look for more information themselves.

Men were more likely than women to seek out further science-related information on the same topic. By contrast, women were more likely than men to share or discuss the science-related information they had seen. These differences were irrespective of whether they had actively sought out this information or passively come across it.

Traditional media versus new media

Further insights come from comparing traditional media (TV, radio, and newspapers or magazines) to new media (social media platforms and YouTube).

The chart below shows the perceived value and use of information actively sought in the bars on the left, and information passively received in the bars on the right – both broken down between traditional and new media.

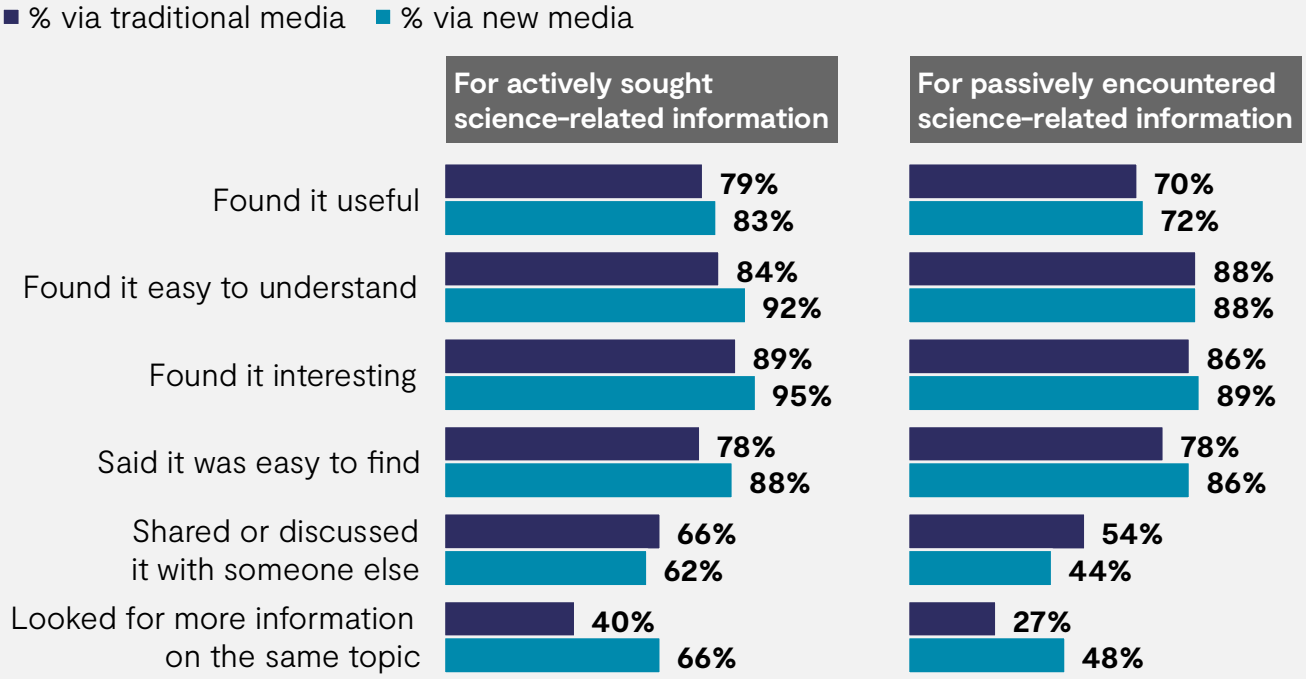
Science-related information sought out via new media was regarded as more interesting, easier to understand and easier to find

As the chart indicates, **science-related information sought out via new media rather than traditional media was considered more interesting, easier to understand and easier to find**. Furthermore, **science-related information on new media was more likely to be followed up by people looking for more information**.

Interestingly, science-related information passively encountered via traditional media (which could still be online, through streaming services or websites), was more likely to be shared or discussed than the information encountered on new media.

Perceived value and use of the information found

Perceived value and use of information actively sought vs passively encountered



Base: 2,921 who recalled where they last actively sought science information; 2,574 UK adults who recalled where they last came across science -related information without actively seeking it out

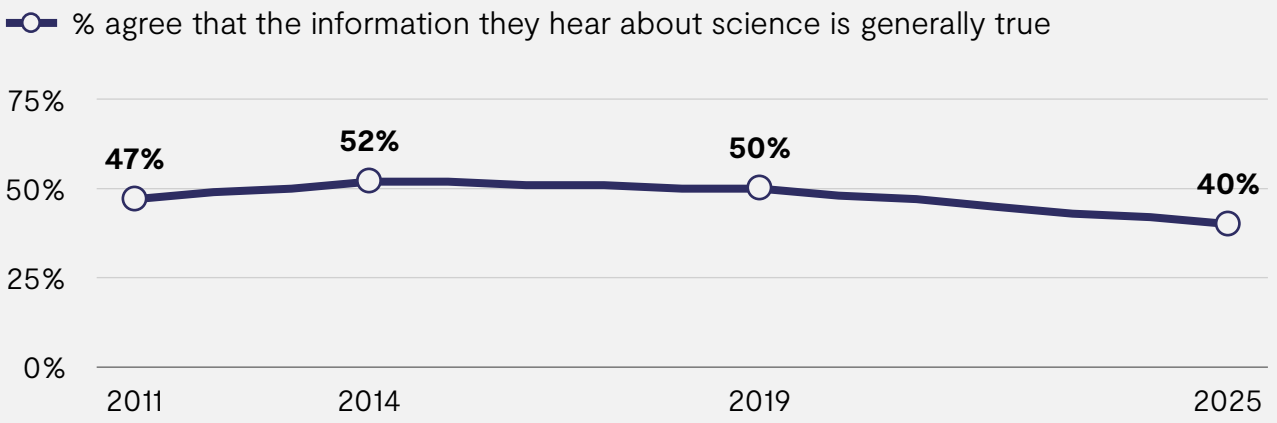
5.6 Trust in information

Two in five people (40%) agreed that the information they heard about science was "generally true", while very few (9%) outright disagreed. This leaves a large group who were uncertain, neither agreeing nor disagreeing (48%).

This **uncertainty around whether to trust science-related information has increased over time** (since the question was first asked in 2011).

Trust in information

Do the public believe that information they hear about science is “generally true”?



Base: 2,616 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B.. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

Men were more likely to agree that the information they see or hear is generally true (46%, versus 34% of women). Graduates were also more likely to agree than average (49%, versus 40% overall).

Why do people trust or distrust information about science generally?

People who thought that the science-related information they heard was generally true or untrue were asked why they thought this. These follow-up questions were unprompted, so the responses reported here have been grouped together to better show the insights. Firstly, the top reasons (all responses above 10%) for trusting information were:

- having trust in the scientific process (27%)
- having trust in specific sources (22%)
- a reputable media (16%)
- people doing their own verification, research and fact-checking of what they heard (11%).

The above list already shows that **most people’s rationale for trusting was not based on validating the information themselves, but was often based on having confidence in processes, sources and institutions**. Other responses were less frequent.

The top reasons (all responses above 10%) for distrusting science-related information in general were:

- information **overall** often being biased, misleading, conflicting or fake (24%)
- Information **in the media** being biased, misleading, conflicting or fake (19%)
- Information **on social media specifically** often being biased, misleading, conflicting or fake (20%)
- science information being influenced by money, politics or other agendas (12%).

The responses suggest a range of concerns around information sources and wider agendas. They also suggest particular concerns around science-related information on social media, which – as noted earlier in this chapter – has become a prolific source for such information.

While methodology changes limit direct comparisons to previous editions of PAS, the shifts in the top responses suggest new factors are affecting trust. In PAS 2025, biased or misleading information was a greater concern than a lack of evidence or information not being checked (both the top responses in 2014 and 2019).

Trust based on where the information came from

This section focuses on individuals who either actively sought or passively encountered science-related information two weeks before the survey.

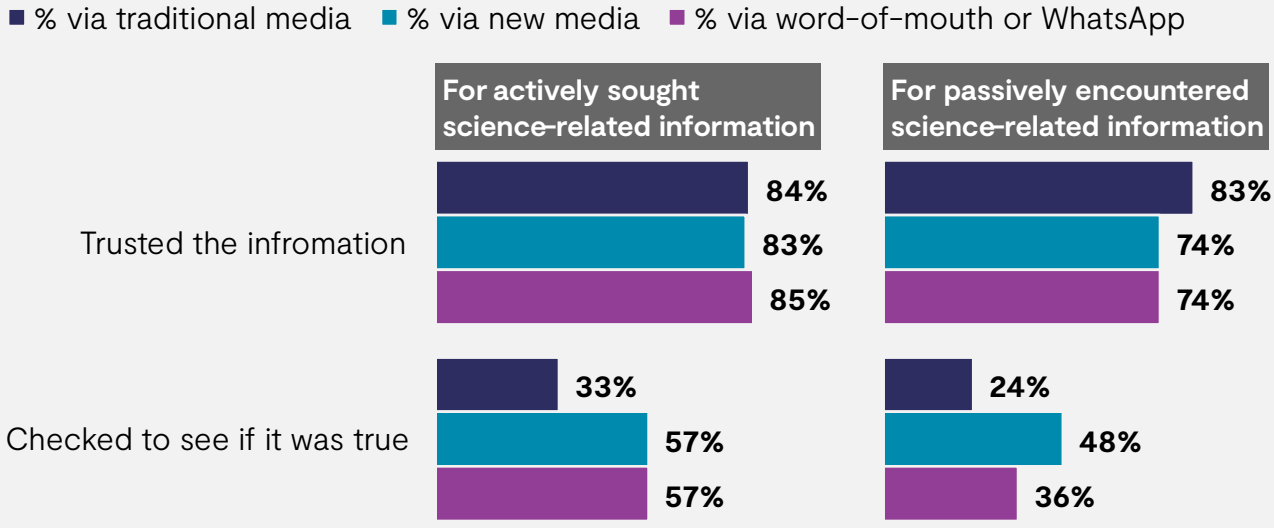
Information was more trusted when actively sought (87%) rather than passively encountered (81%). People were also more likely to make efforts to verify information they sought (45%) compared to passively encountered content (31%). In both cases when seeking or receiving information, trust levels were higher than verification levels, suggesting that **trust was not necessarily based on people checking the information for themselves**.

The following chart shows the levels of trust and verification of information actively sought in the bars on the left, and of information passively encountered in the bars on the right – both broken down by the information channel. It illustrates that **people seeking out information tended to trust it regardless of where it came from, be it traditional media, new media or via conversations with friends, family or colleagues** (including on WhatsApp).

People were more likely to check information from non-traditional media sources than from traditional ones, suggesting greater scepticism of new media. However, **many were not doing any form of checking, before deciding to trust what they saw** (e.g., only 36% verified information they had passively encountered via word-of-mouth or WhatsApp).

Trust in information

Perceived trust and verification of information actively sought vs passively encountered



Base: 2,921 who recalled where they last actively sought science information; 2,574 UK adults who recalled where they last came across science -related information without actively seeking it out

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 6

Participation in science

6 Participation in science

People participate in science as a subject at school, in science careers, and through activities like consultation, dialogue or citizen science. This chapter first explores people's perceptions of science at school, followed by careers in both science and in research and innovation roles. It subsequently looks at public perceptions of and appetite for wider forms of involvement.

Secondly, the chapter covers perceptions of representation, equality and diversity in science. This was measured with a largely new set of questions for 2025.

The overall story

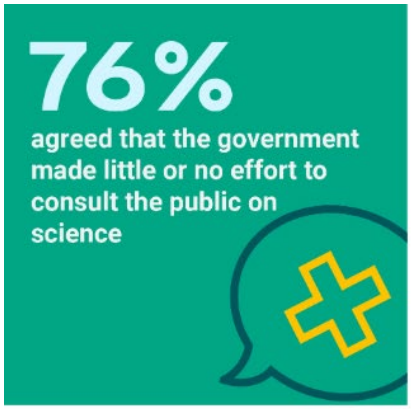
PAS once again highlights the challenges around public participation in science. On one hand, **increasing public participation was of great importance to people**, in terms of careers, and involvement in decisions and policy on science issues. The vast majority felt that young people's interest in science is essential for our future prosperity, that people should have more say in decisions about science, and that they personally were clever enough to understand science and technology – the latter opinion had risen consistently since 2000. **Most people also believed that science needs to be representative**, in terms of who carries out scientific studies, who takes part in them, and who benefits from them.

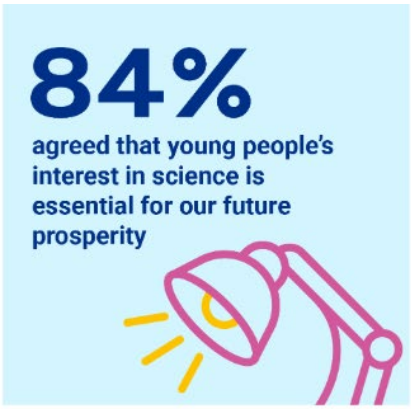
> **Increasing public participation was of great importance to people**

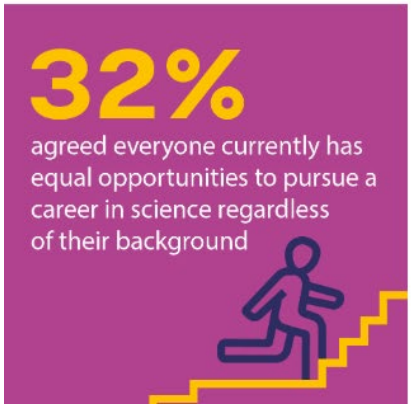
On the other hand, as in previous years, **people were often more interested in knowing the public was involved, rather than getting involved themselves**. And there was relatively low willingness or confidence to get involved in ways that could be time consuming or require more specific expertise. Moreover, several trends pointed to **increasing uncertainty or ambivalence compared to previous years**, particularly among young people aged 16 to 24.

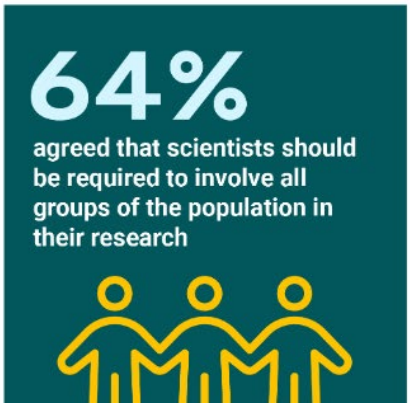
At the same time, expectations were high, with **most thinking that the government was doing too little to consult people on science**. There were also **polarised views about science benefiting the rich more than the poor**, especially among those currently facing financial hardship, and about **a perceived lack of equal opportunities to pursue a career in science**.

The headlines









6.1 Science education

It was **a widespread view that young people's interest in science is essential for our future prosperity**. A total of 84% agreed and just 4% disagreed with this sentiment. This was in line with previous years, back to when the question was first asked in 2008.

In this context, it is important to understand perceptions of science in school, and how this carries forward into people's adult lives. PAS has regularly asked two questions about this, which both suggest that views have remained broadly positive on this topic:

- 23% agreed that school put them off science. This was a minority view, with double this proportion disagreeing (52%).
- More agreed (43%) than disagreed (31%) that the science they learnt at school had been useful in their everyday lives, although this was a more polarising statement.

A new question this year provides an alternative viewpoint, more positive than in the second bullet point above. Half (49%) agreed that studying science subjects (e.g., physics, chemistry or biology) at school or beyond had given them the skills to think critically in their daily lives. A fifth (22%) disagreed. This suggests that people can often have a more nuanced view on the usefulness of school science in their daily lives. At this question, people from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds were more likely to agree (65% and 60% respectively).

However, **positivity about school science has declined**. In 2019, 59% disagreed that school put them off science (i.e., they had a positive view). In 2025, just 52% disagreed. Instead, more

people neither agreed nor disagreed. Responses to this question had previously been stable since it was first asked in 2005.

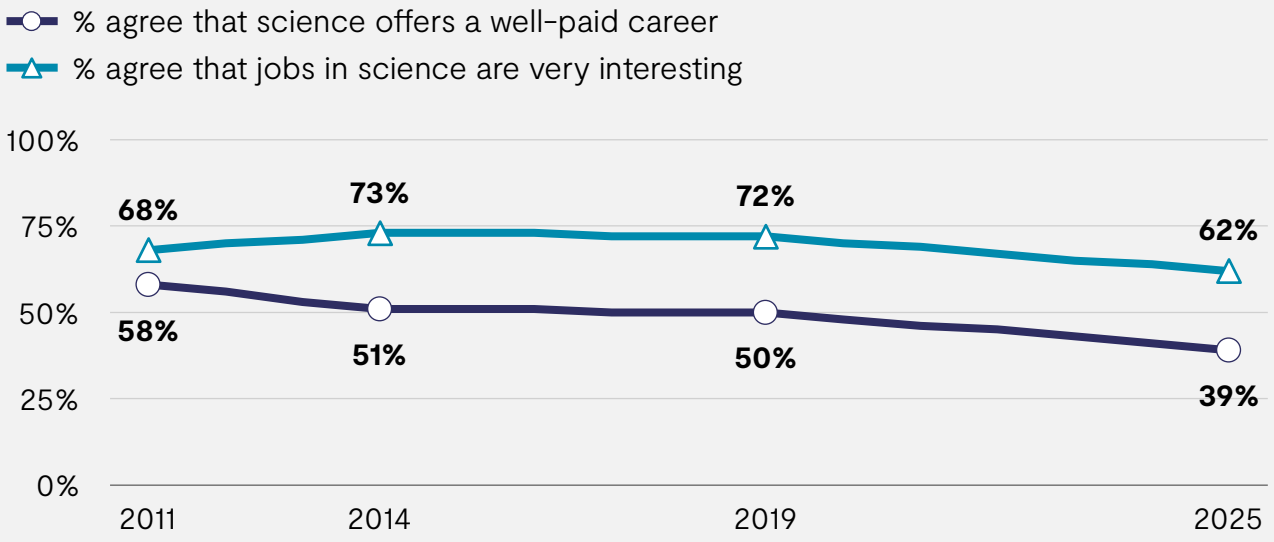
Similarly concerning was the split by age at this question. **Young people aged 16 to 24 were more likely than average to agree that school put them off science** (32% agreed, versus 23% overall). This could be because this age group completed their secondary education more recently, and therefore simply recalled it more vividly than older age groups. However, the two previous waves (2019 and 2014) did not find a statistically significant difference between younger and older age groups.

6.2 Careers in science

There was **majority agreement that jobs in science were interesting, but fewer agreed these jobs were well-paid**. As the following chart shows, opinions have become less positive on both counts since 2019 and compared to when first asked in 2011.

Careers in science

Do the public believe that jobs in science offer an interesting, well -paid career?



Base: 2,616 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

For the first time, parallel questions were asked about jobs in "research and innovation". These received very similar answers to science, with 63% agreeing that jobs in research and innovation were very interesting, and 35% agreeing that working in research and innovation offers a well-paid career.

These questions also highlighted some important subgroup differences. The findings are shown for science below, but similar differences were also present for research and innovation:

- Young people aged 16 to 24 were more likely than average to disagree that jobs in science were interesting (13%, compared with 5% overall).
- Those with a science or engineering degree were also more likely than average to disagree that science offered a well-paid career (30%, versus 13% overall).

6.3 Consultation, dialogue and wider involvement

The importance of consultation and dialogue

As previously covered in Chapter 4, **a clear majority wanted public views to be reflected in science policy**, with 62% agreeing that the government should act in accordance with public concerns about science. Other data from the survey suggests **this was not perceived to be happening enough**, with just 12% agreeing that the public is sufficiently involved in decisions about science and technology.

The public largely placed responsibility for this on the government, with 76% saying the government was not making very much effort, or no effort at all, to consult the public on science. A fifth (19%) felt they were making a fair amount of effort, and 2% said they were making a great deal of effort.

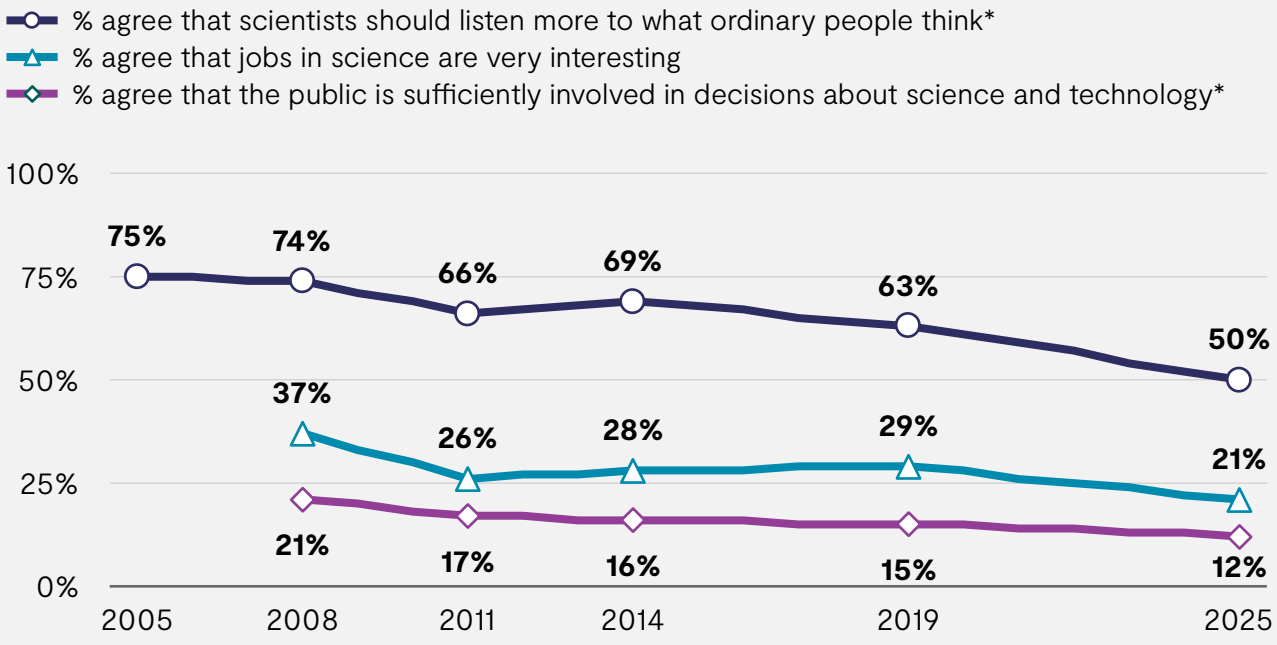
On a related note, the idea that scientists should listen more to what ordinary people think was also popular. However, the findings suggest that **less emphasis was placed on scientists themselves than on government to consult**. Around half (50%) agreed with this viewpoint while 14% disagreed, and a third (35%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

People have become more critical of government in relation to consultation on science, and less so of scientists themselves

Similarly critical views on efforts to involve the public have been raised in previous years of PAS. However, as the chart below shows, **people have become more critical of government in relation to consultation on science, and less so of scientists themselves**.

Consultation, dialogue and wider involvement

What do the public think of the current state of consultation and dialogue around science?



Base: 5,281 (or 2,616*) UK adults aged 16 and over
*N.B. these questions were asked to a random half of the full sample

There were notable subgroup differences by gender and age:

- Women were more likely than men to want more involvement from the public in decision-making, and for scientists to listen more to "ordinary people". In contrast, men were more likely than women to think the government was already doing enough to consult the public and had less desire for ordinary people to get more involved.
- 16 to 24 year-olds were more likely than average to think the government was making at least a fair amount of effort to consult the public on science (30%, versus 21% overall).

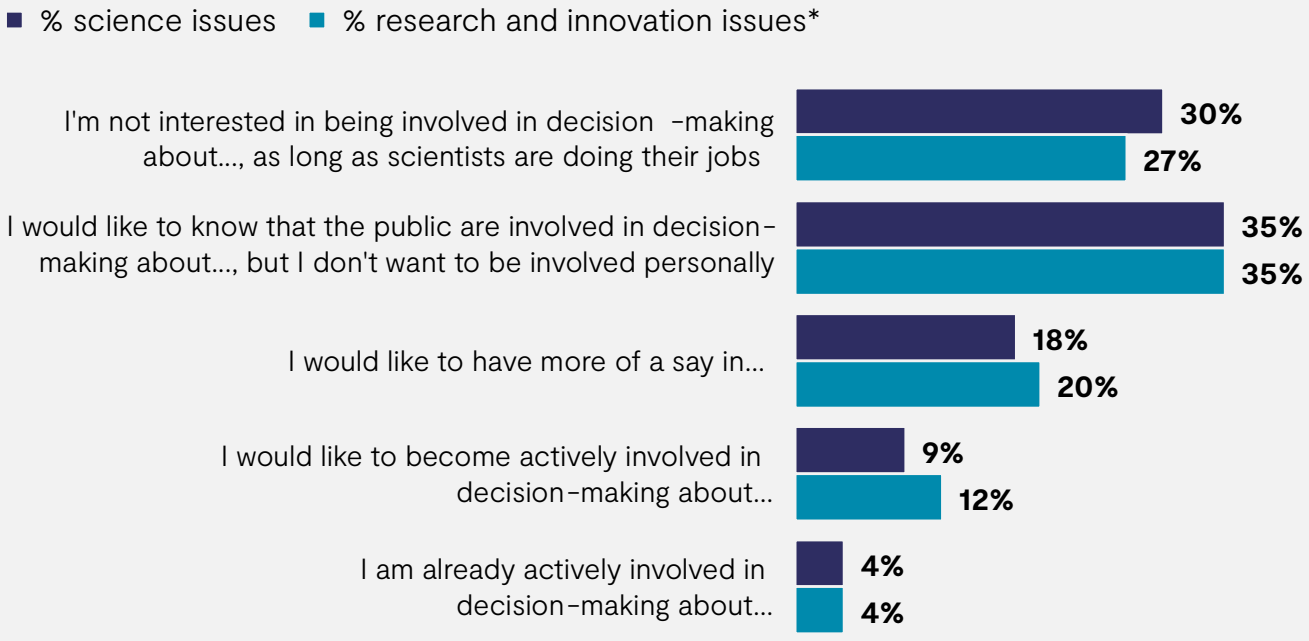
Getting personally involved in decisions about science

A common challenge for policymakers, given people's desire for more consultation and public involvement in decision-making, is that a majority of the public are not especially willing to get involved personally. This is reflected in the following chart. The findings for "science" were close to the 2019 and 2014 results (when the question was introduced). The parallel question asking about "research and innovation" was new for 2025 and received a very similar set of responses.

These responses are not unique to decision-making on science, research and innovation. The earlier Audit of Political Engagement research series, which ran until 2019 in the UK, regularly highlighted a lack of willingness among individuals to be personally involved in local and national decision-making on broader political and governmental issues.

Consultation, dialogue and wider involvement

The public's view on getting personally involved in decisions about science



Base: 2,616 or 2,480* UK adults age 16 or over

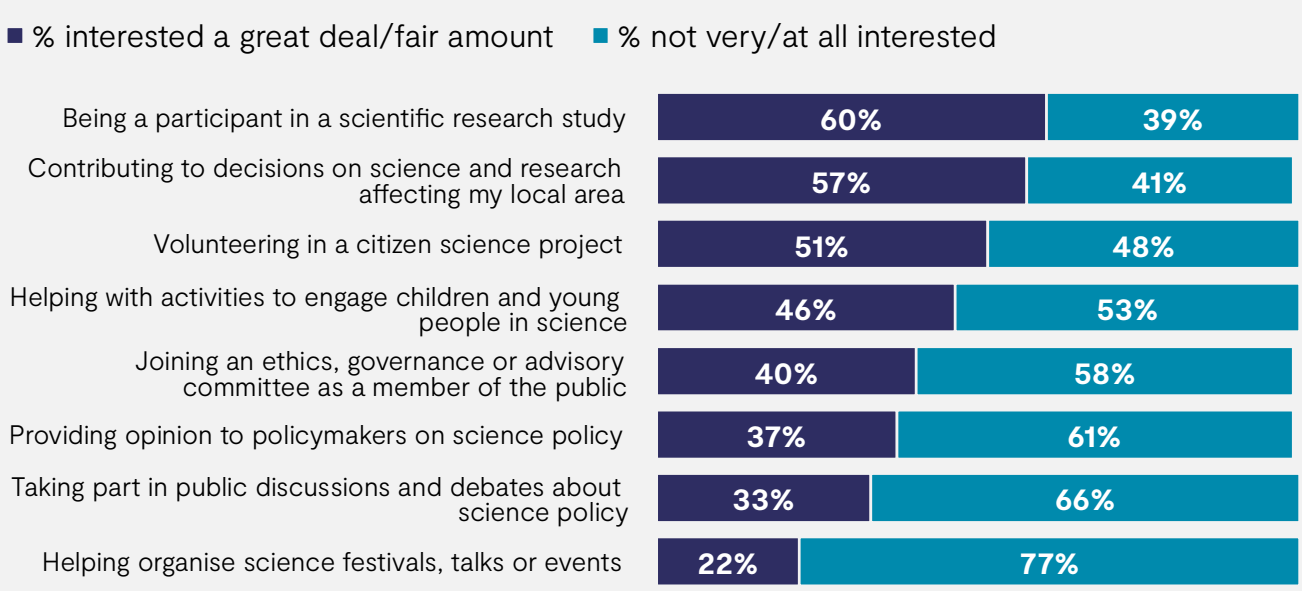
The responses varied by gender, with men showing a greater desire than women to have more of a say in science, and in research and innovation issues. Women instead were more likely than men to want to know that the public was being involved, but fewer wanted to be involved personally.

How would people want to get involved?

The previous section highlighted a lack of willingness to get involved personally in science, but this may reflect a lack of awareness of the range of ways in which people can get involved. To that end, a new question was introduced in 2025 to explore various types of science-related activities the public might want to be involved in. The list, shown in the chart below, suggests there was relatively widespread interest in certain forms of participation such as taking part in research studies or volunteering. There was less interest in activities that could be more time consuming or require more specific expertise, such as taking part in public discussions and debates, or helping organise festivals, talks or events. It is also a possibility from these findings that events and opportunities tied to people's local areas would have a stronger pull than other forms of engagement.

Consultation, dialogue and wider involvement

What scientific activities might the public want to get personally involved with?



Base: 5,281 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. the chart excludes "don't know" responses

There were notable differences between genders. Women showed more of an interest than men in volunteering roles, while men gravitated more towards roles that involved them in shaping science policy. Younger groups aged 16 to 24 were also more likely than average to express interest in all the activities listed. People from Asian and Black ethnic groups were also more likely than White people to express interest in participating in ethics committees.

6.4 Representation, equality and diversity

The importance of representation in science

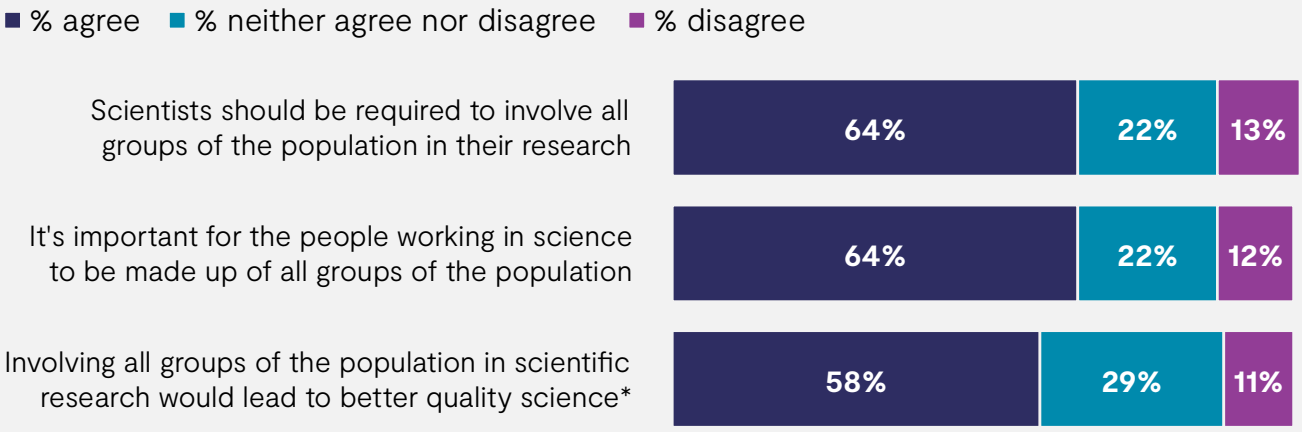
The 2025 survey introduced a new set of questions to explore people's views on representation, equality and diversity within science. In particular, three new questions asked about the representation of diverse groups, referring specifically to "women, ethnic minorities, all social classes, disabled and neurodivergent people".

As the chart below shows, **a clear majority of people thought it was important to have representation in science**, across all of these aspects. The statement saying that this would lead to better quality science garnered a more neutral response than the others, suggesting that people were perhaps more unsure how improving representation could improve quality.

A clear majority of people thought it was important to have representation in science

Representation, equality and diversity

The public's views on representation, equality and diversity within science



Base: 2,616 (or 2,480*) UK adults age 16 or over (n.b. each question was asked to a random half of the full sample)
N.B. these questions were asked to random half sample. The chart excludes "don't know" responses

Gender differences were evident here, with **women more supportive of greater representation than men** across all three of the statements above. In addition, those with high science capital (who had more interaction with science and scientists in their day-to-day lives) were more likely than average to disagree that scientists should be required to involve all groups of the population in their research, and that the people working in science should be representative of the population. These findings may benefit from further unpacking in future research.

Is science representative?

Opinions were divided as to whether science was succeeding at representing or delivering for all groups equally:

- A third (34%) agreed that scientific advances tended to benefit the rich more than the poor, with a similar proportion disagreeing (31%), or neither agreeing nor disagreeing (34%). This varied by age, with younger people more likely to agree than those aged 65 or over. Notably, those who said elsewhere in the questionnaire that they were finding it difficult to get by on their present incomes were also more likely to agree.
- A new question was added this year to understand whether people felt personally represented in scientific research. Nearly half (48%) neither agreed nor disagreed that scientists "don't consider people like me" when designing their research. While 26% agreed

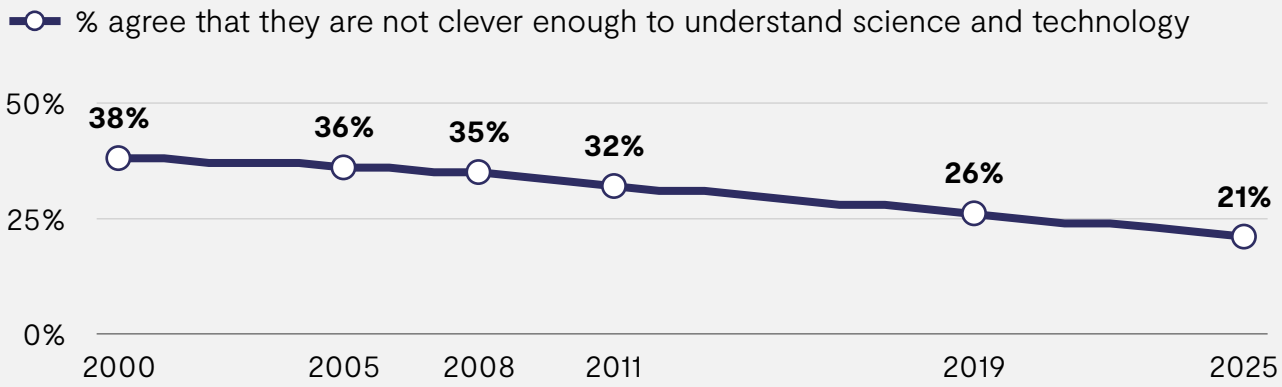
that scientists “don’t consider people like me”, a similar proportion (23%) disagreed. Those from an Asian ethnic background, and those who were finding it difficult to get by on their present incomes, were both more inclined to feel that scientists did not consider people like them.

Barriers to participation

PAS has long asked (since 2000) whether people think they are clever enough to understand science and technology. The perception that people are not clever enough – the question is asked inversely – has fallen consistently over the last 25 years, as the following chart shows. Therefore, this does not appear to be a major barrier to participation.

Barriers to participation

The public's views on representation, equality and diversity within science

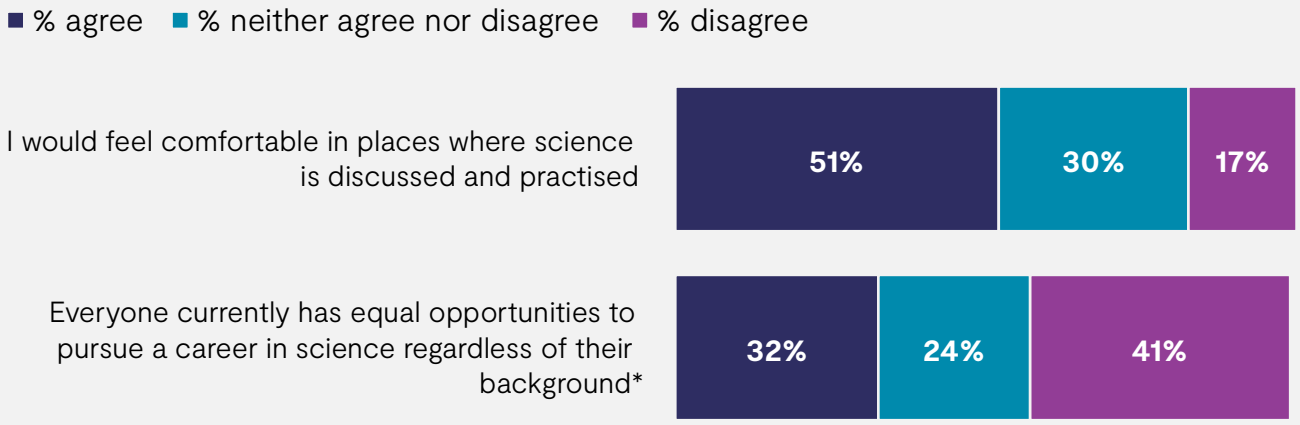


Base: 2,616 UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. this question was asked to a random half of the full sample

Two new questions were included this year to further explore this theme. The chart below shows that while half would feel comfortable in places where science is discussed practised, a sizable minority (17%) would not. In addition, **opinions were considerably polarised as to whether everyone has equal opportunities to pursue a career in science**.

Barriers to participation

How comfortable would the public feel in places where science is discussed and practised?



Base: 5,281 (or 2,480*, or 2,616**) UK adults age 16 or over
N.B. two questions were asked to a random half of the full sample and to the full sample

There were different responses by gender and age. Women expressed more scepticism than men that everyone has equal opportunities to pursue a career in science (45% versus 37% disagreeing). There was also greater disagreement among younger age groups (47% of 16 to 24 year-olds and 50% of 25 to 34 year-olds disagreed, versus 34% of those aged 65 or more).

> **Opinions were polarised as to whether everyone has equal opportunities to pursue a career in science**

UK Research and Innovation

CHAPTER 7

Deeper engagement through science capital

7 Deeper engagement through science capital

The more science capital someone has, the more they have interacted with science or scientists in their day-to-day lives, either through studying, careers, leisure activities, or friends and family. This short final chapter brings together the analysis of science capital reported across the previous chapters. It covers how science capital is split across the population, and the associations between high or low science capital, and attitudes to science. Collectively, this data helps to demonstrate how **a more rounded experience of science can deepen engagement**.

7.1 How much science capital does the UK public have?

The science capital index brings together data across multiple questions in the survey, to be able to segment people into three groups – high, medium and low science capital. There is more detail on how the index is constructed in the Technical Report.

A fifth (21%) of the public had high science capital. That is, they were highly connected to science or scientists in their daily lives.

A total of 13% had low science capital, meaning they had interacted relatively little with science or scientists in their daily lives. A further 66% fell into a middle group, with medium science capital.

Compared to 2019, fewer people fell into the low science capital group (down from 18% to 13%). More fell into the medium science capital group (up from 60% to 66%). In other words, **the volume of science capital has increased across the public**. This reinforces findings in Chapter 1 showing that fewer people were wholly disconnected from science and scientists than in 2019. At the same time, the proportion with high science capital has not shifted. Therefore, more people may be engaging with science in a relatively shallow way.

7.2 Who has more or less science capital?

Science capital was not distributed evenly across all groups of the population:

Men tended to have more science capital than women.

Those aged 65 or over tended to have less science capital than others.

Across ethnicities, science capital was relatively evenly distributed.

Geographically, those in London tended to have more science capital, whereas those in Yorkshire and the Humber and in Scotland tended to have less.

There were differences by social status, with people in managerial or professional occupations typically having more science capital than those in clerical, manual or service jobs.

7.3 The impact of science capital

Across the data, those with high and low science capital had very different opinions. The former tended to have more positive attitudes to science, greater trust in scientists and a greater willingness to engage in science issues:

Higher science capital was linked to more emphatic support for science generally, and for the government funding of science.	Those with low science capital were generally more uncertain or ambivalent across these questions. For example, 84% of those with high science capital felt that the government should fund scientific research even if it brought no immediate benefits, versus 44% of those with low science capital.
Trust and science capital were positively correlated.	Individuals with high science capital tended to exhibit higher trust in scientists, researchers and engineers regardless of where they worked. They were also more likely to believe the information they heard about science was "generally true". Again, those with low science capital were more uncertain or ambivalent, i.e. more likely to neither agree nor disagree.
Higher science capital was associated with greater engagement and willingness to engage.	For example, 91% of those with high science capital had sought out science-related information in the two weeks prior to the survey, compared with just 17% of those with low science capital. Those with high science capital were also more interested than average in becoming involved in decision-making on science issues.
Higher science capital aligned with more scepticism of government and its handling of science.	For instance, 49% of those with high science capital agreed that the risks of new science and technology could not be properly controlled by government, versus 35% of those with low science capital. And those with high science capital were more polarised than average when asked if government ministers regularly use science to inform their decisions – they were both more likely to agree and more likely to disagree.
Those with lower science capital were less likely to feel they had benefited personally from science.	Just 13% agreed that science had increased their personal prosperity, versus 84% of those with high science capital.

However, there were also areas of common ground around the importance of science communication and representation in science, and common concerns around the potential politicisation of science. In these areas, the amount of science capital someone had made no difference

Both groups reported on balance that they heard or saw too little information about science.

Both wanted government ministers to be less involved in setting the rules and regulations for scientists. Those with high science capital specifically wanted scientists to be more involved in setting rules and regulations.

Both were just as likely to value representation in science, for example agreeing that scientists should be required to involve all groups of the population in their research. And both were similarly sceptical that everyone currently has equal opportunities to pursue a career in science regardless of their background.

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