Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Public attitudes to science in Wales: summary

This research captures attitudes towards science among the Welsh public via a survey. This includes their attitudes, understanding and engagement with science and technology.

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1. Research aims and methodology

The aim of this research was to collect data that would capture public perceptions of science, scientific research and technology in Wales. The survey included questions regarding attitudes, understanding and engagement with science and scientific-related matters.

The research may be used to inform and encourage further, more in-depth research. It could also direct the development of policy regarding scientific-related matters.

The data collection was completed by Beaufort Omnibus Survey team on behalf of Welsh Government. The Omnibus sample is designed to be a representative quota sample consisting of the adult population aged 16 and over who are resident in Wales. Interviews are conducted face to face in the homes of respondents utilising CAPI (Computer Aided Personal Interviewing) technology. Fieldwork took place between 24 February and 15 March 2020. The target response rate was 1000. However, only 713 interviews were completed and analysed because fieldwork was suspended in March 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak and the social distancing measures which were put in place.

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Some of the questions included in the report were taken from surveys run in different countries, to allow for international comparisons to take place.

2. Key findings

Attitudes towards science

Generally, public attitudes to science and technology were very positive. In particular, over 8 in 10 interviewed agreed that that “Young people’s interest in science and technology is essential for Wales’ future prosperity and Science and technology are important for addressing key societal challenges.”

High levels of agreement were also evident with statements relating science with the economy. For example, "A consistent supply of science and technology graduates is important for economic prosperity" (86%) and "Scientific research directly contributes to economic growth" (80%).

Almost three-quarters of respondents (74%) thought that the Welsh Government should invest more in scientific research, innovation and education.

Perceived importance of science

Science was considered important by the great majority of interviewees in each of the areas they were asked about. The statement with this highest level of agreement was “Science is important for improving human health” (94%). The statement with the lowest level of agreement was “Science is important for the creation of new jobs.” (82%).

3. Conclusions

This survey demonstrates that public attitudes towards science are generally positive.

Statements which positively associated science with the future economy and

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employment tended to have high levels of agreement. This suggests that the public values the contribution science, technology and scientific research make to the economy.

Almost a third (31%) of those interviewed did not feel well informed about science. This is something which should be considered when Welsh Government is communicating scientific findings and scientific advancements in future.

Around 8 in 10 agreed that science advice should inform Government policy and decision making. This implies that the majority of the public value government decisions made on the basis of scientific evidence and advice.

Generally, the questions in this research which were the same as those asked in the surveys in other countries had similar levels of agreement and disagreement.

Contact details

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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