

Climate for research in decline

Only one in four Swedes, 27 percent, think that Sweden has a good research climate. Just under half, 45 percent, believe that more investment in research will lead to a better society for all. These are two conclusions from a new study conducted by Swedish organisation VA (Public & Science), in cooperation with the SOM Institute.

People with a high level of education are more positive about the potential of research and have higher confidence in researchers. However, they have a more negative view of Sweden's research climate.

38 percent are of the opinion that Swedish research is competitive, which is a fall of 15 percent since 2003.

7 percent of Swedes believe that research does *not* take ethical issues seriously – a fall from 11 percent in 2003. The same number, 7 percent, believe that cheating happens often in research. And four in ten people, mainly women, have no opinion.

Throughout the study, many people responded that they have “no opinion” on issues relating to research.

“This may be because researchers are not sufficiently visible and people have only a vague picture of what they actually do,” says Karin Hermansson, Research Director at VA, who is also responsible for the study.

Confidence in research varies depending on the field. Medical research, with 77 percent, is the field most highly trusted, followed by technology, 69 percent, natural sciences, 64 percent, social sciences 49 percent, educational science 39 percent – and lastly humanities, a field that enjoys confidence from only 35 percent of people. Confidence in medical research has declined somewhat since the annual survey started in 2002, while confidence in the other fields has remained stable.

Research initiatives in medicine, energy and the environment are prioritized by Swedes. “Fields that are regarded as ‘useful’, that are often reported in the media and that many people feel affects their lives are the ones people want to invest the most in,” says Karin Hermansson.

One in five people search for information about current research on the Internet at least once a week, and three in ten read popular science magazines at least once a month. 17 percent go to popular science lectures at least one a year, while eight in ten never do. Men and people with a high level of education are more interested in learning about popular science than women and people with a lower level of education.

“Confidence in research is changing. Just like glaciers threatened by climate change, confidence is gradually melting away. It's time for the research community to start paying attention,” says Sören Holmberg, professor of political science at the SOM Institute.

The study involved 3,000 Swedes and is part of the 2009/2010 SOM (Society Opinion Massmedia) study at the University of Gothenburg. The study is available in Swedish only.

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