



Tailwind for sciences

Confidence in scientists is increasing in Sweden. More and more people believe that scientific developments have made life better and more young people want to become scientists. These are conclusions from a new survey conducted by Public & Science (Vetenskap & Allmänhet, VA).

With the help of Synovate, VA asked just over 1,000 Swedes in September 2008 about their views of science and researchers. Similar surveys have been carried out since 2002.

“Following a decline over the past few years, Swedish attitudes seem to be changing and becoming more positive,” says Karin Hermansson, Research Director at VA, who is responsible for the VA Barometer.

Four out of five people believe that both scientific and technological developments have made life better. This is higher than last year and a break with previous trends.

A full 78 per cent have a high or very high level of confidence in researchers at universities, the highest figure noted so far. Confidence in industry researchers is only at 48 per cent and has been declining the last couple of years.

Confidence is a perishable item and can easily be erased. In response to a question about the news people have read that may have affected their level of confidence, they name cheating, unethical behaviour, “strange” research, results that are too limited or contradictory and biased research.

Viewed over time, fewer and fewer people feel that “science and technology are too difficult for most people to understand,” which indicates that respect for research is declining. Still, four out of ten agree with this statement.

Two out of three believe that research can help slow climate change. Since 2004 this statistic has almost doubled.

“The climate debate picked up speed after hurricane Katrina in the US as well as a bad storm in Sweden in 2005. This may have raised hopes that research can help. Many more people believe in the ability of research to slow climate change compared to the ability of the political and industrial spheres,” says Karin Hermansson.

14 per cent consider astrology to be a scientific subject, which is clearly the lowest level since VA started its surveys. In the past many more young women than young men considered this field to be scientific. This year the same number of young women and men – just under one in four – stated that astrology is scientific.

Young people are becoming more interested in working as scientists in the future. Now four out of ten young men and three out of ten young women are interested in a scientific career.

“It’s also gratifying that fewer young people than older people believe that science and technology are too difficult to understand,” says Camilla Modéer, General Secretary at VA.

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Public & Science (Vetenskap & Allmänhet) aims to promote dialogue and openness between the public – especially the young – and scientists. The association endeavours to stimulate new forms of dialogue in unexpected arenas on concrete issues that concern people. The members are various organisations, public authorities, companies and individuals. See also www.v-a.se