



## Confidence in scientists on the decline

**Barely six out of ten Swedes have confidence in scientists and there has been a decline of six percentage points over the past year. Supporters of the Left Party and the Nationalist Democrats (political parties at each end of the political spectrum) have the least positive view of scientific development, according to a new study carried out by Vetenskap & Allmänhet (Public & Science), VA, and the SOM Institute**

58 per cent of Swedes have a high or fairly high level of confidence in scientists, compared to 62 per cent last year and a full 67 per cent six years ago when this survey was first carried out.

Professors Sören Holmberg and Lennart Weibull of the SOM Institute believe that the financial crisis may have contributed to the decline in confidence.

“A lot of attention has been focused on how poorly experts and researchers have understood the situation, and on their inability to predict what happened.”

Confidence in researchers and scientists has declined more than in other professional groups, although they are still comparatively well regarded. Healthcare personnel are at the top of the confidence league (82 per cent) followed by the police (62 per cent) and then scientists. At the bottom of the league are lobbyists (7 per cent).

Fewer people have confidence in universities than in their researchers. But in relation to other social institutions, confidence in universities is high at 53 per cent. Only the healthcare sector has a higher percentage.

“Perhaps there’s an element of hope in this, that education might be perceived as an important component in saving Sweden from the financial crisis,” say Sören Holmberg and Lennart Weibull.

The public has the most confidence in medical research, 80 per cent, followed by technology, 72, natural sciences, 65, social sciences, 50, educational science, 38, and the humanities in which only 37 per cent of the public have confidence.

The Liberal Party’s supporters have the highest level of confidence in most of the research fields, while the Nationalist Democrats and Left Party sympathisers have less confidence in research than others. Young people aged 15–19 consistently have the least confidence in research. The opposite is true of highly educated people.

There is a clear correlation between confidence and a willingness to invest in research.

“People support research that they understand and perceive as useful. That’s why there needs to be more contact between scientists and the public. Scientists should also contribute more to the public debate,” says Karin Hermansson, Research Director at VA.

**More information:** The study involved interviews with 3,000 Swedes and is part of the 2008/2009 SOM study (Society Opinion Mass Media) at the University of Gothenburg.

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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 issues that concern people. The members are various organisations, public authorities, companies and individuals. See also [www.v-a.se](http://www.v-a.se)*