



## How Journalists View Science – Summary

VA-report 2005:6

A total of five hundred and fifty journalists have been interviewed about their views on science and their experience of communicating with researchers. The main interview group consisted of journalists with all specialities and working in all types of media. In addition to this main group, an additional group of journalists were interviewed and their views compared with those of journalists in general. Finally, a group of journalism students were interviewed, and their views are also reported in this study.

Journalists are highly educated people. Many of the respondents already had a university degree before choosing to become a journalist. Consequently, journalists share the same attitudes to research and researchers as the more highly educated members of the public. They have a high level of confidence in researchers and a positive attitude to scientific and technical developments. Journalists also have a good understanding of which subject areas are scientific, and rarely consider science and technology to be too difficult for most people to understand.

In comparison to the general public, journalists have greater confidence that research will lead to economic growth. This is probably a reflection of the fact that journalists are often very interested in politics and social issues. An interest in social sciences is also seen in the answers given in the open questions in the survey.

It is possible to conclude, therefore, that journalists find research aimed at benefiting society of particular interest. On the other hand, journalists, and especially science journalists, also clearly have a more positive attitude than the general public to basic research with no obvious applications.

Nearly two-thirds of the journalists, and nine out of ten science journalists, have contact with researchers at universities. Most often this contact is via the telephone. Most journalists have positive experiences of their research contacts. However, many stated it would be useful if researchers could better summarise the most important points of their research, and explain their research in a clearer and more simple way.

The internet is the most important source of information for journalists, and many would like to see more easily accessible information about research available on the net. Journalists consider their own lack of knowledge as being the biggest obstacle to producing satisfactory reports on research, but lack of time, resources and publication space are also limiting factors.

A larger proportion of journalists than of the general public believe that research results should be disseminated quickly, although they also believe that there are too many alarmist reports and “scare stories” in the press. Responses to open questions indicated that many journalists feel a responsibility to communicate research information to the public, but at the same time believe that the media have a responsibility to filter out alarmist reports.

In summary, journalists have a positive attitude to research and researchers, but they need clear and easily accessible information about research findings on the Internet.