



vetenskap & allmänhet

How the Public Views Science 2005 - Summary

VA report 2005:4

Since 2002, Vetenskap & Allmänhet have carried out an annual study into the public's views of science and researchers. The aims are to build up the knowledge base of people's opinions, attitudes and beliefs, and to measure any trends, patterns or changes in these. In other words, it aims to be a science barometer.

The majority of questions in this year's study are the same as in previous years, but certain questions are rotated in order to cover a greater breadth of topics. Each year we also include certain new questions.

The study was carried out between August 29th and September 1st 2005 through over a thousand telephone interviews. The people interviewed were a representative sample of the Swedish population from across the country and all were aged 16 and over.

The most important findings in brief:

- A large majority, more than eight out of ten, of the public continue to think that scientific and technological developments have made life better for ordinary people.
- Four out of ten consider science and technology too difficult to understand. This proportion has steadily decreased since 2002.
- The public continues to have a high degree of confidence and trust in scientific researchers.
- Trust in journalists writing for national newspapers as well as for local morning papers is lower than for news journalists on Swedish television channels SVT and TV4. Only about one third of the questioned have a high confidence in journalists at national newspapers.
- Nine out of ten people are very confident that research will lead to the development of a vaccine against HIV / AIDS. However, only a small proportion believes that research can help reduce problems of social segregation in large towns and cities.
- More than half of those questioned believe that research has a strong possibility to slow climate change. This figure has risen markedly since 2003 and 2004.
- Nine out of ten believe, in line with this, that it is important that the state supports research into developing effective and environmentally friendly energy sources.
- An increasing number of people, more than eight out of ten, would like to see investment in gene technology research which has the potential to treat illnesses.
- People support state investment above all into research where the potential outcome is clearly beneficial. There are therefore more people who would support research within modern history which would for example, counteract armed conflict, than who would support research into the origins of the universe.
- Medicine continues its strong position as the subject area considered as most scientific.
- Astrology seems to be losing supporters in this respect, but the time scale is too short to show a clear trend here. 17 per cent of the questioned consider astrology to be a scientific subject.
- More than eight out of ten people believe that research results should be confirmed through further investigations before being presented to the public. Two thirds also think that too many alarmist reports are reported in the media.