

## Shaping CaSE's public opinion tracker: Reflections from the R&D sector

CaSE is building on its extensive public opinion research to create a robust data series that tracks attitudes to R&D over time. Using CaSE's Public Attitudes to R&D 2022-23 study as a starting point, we are running repeat polls and qualitative research, including focus groups, in 2025 and 2028 to allow the R&D sector monitor, explore and respond to changes and trends.

To ensure we track the most relevant attitudes and issues, CaSE has engaged across the breadth of the R&D sector. This note summarises roundtable discussions with around 40 organisations, setting out the themes and topics they see as priorities for this tracker.

### Overall approach and sector needs

Participants wanted insights that would support them to develop more tangible messages to engage with the public, particularly on a local level. Participants emphasised the importance of a deeper exploration of the motivations and reasonings underlying public attitudes, and of using this research to challenge sector assumptions about different audiences.

Participants emphasised that CaSE's public opinion research should continue to cover the full breadth of R&D, with many emphasising the need to continue to include the arts, humanities and social sciences. Participants also wanted to consider the different stages of R&D, from curiosity-led to applied research

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### Key themes and topics

Participants highlighted areas where monitoring attitudes would benefit their work:

- **Perceptions of the R&D system:** Participants wanted to explore perceptions of the role that different types of institutions (e.g. public, private and charitable) play in R&D, and how this influences attitudes to them as messengers or advocates for R&D and investment.
- **Investment in R&D:** Many participants use existing CaSE data on attitudes to investment and wanted these questions to be tracked. Additional suggestions included whether the public see R&D investment as a good use of public money at this time and whether the public perceives a regional disparity in R&D funding.

- **Benefits of R&D and investment:** There was strong support for continued exploration of the perceived benefits of R&D at different levels (e.g. personal, family, community, regional, national, global) and whether these benefits were felt equally across society.
  - **R&D as a tool to solve challenges:** Participants wanted to explore whether the public see R&D as relevant to tackling the major societal issues they care about, on local, national and global levels.
  - **Making R&D more local:** Participants wanted CaSE to continue its focus on place by deepening the sector's understanding of where R&D sits within communities. Discussions touched on universities' role as civic organisations, local research institutions' links to strategic local industries, and whether the public thinks local research institutions carry out R&D to address local problems.
  - **Engagement, involvement and trust:** Participants wanted to explore how the public is engaged or involved with R&D, including their information sources and experience or interest in involvement, which ranged from citizen science to clinical trials to co-designing research projects. The value of exploring trust in different aspects of R&D and potential messengers was also emphasised.
  - **Current issues:** Themes that are currently affecting the sector, including immigration, increased mis/disinformation, and universities' financial sustainability were also raised. However, it was recognised that these may be better explored by CaSE and others through responsive polls, rather than prioritising their inclusion in the tracker
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## Outputs

CaSE has produced a range of outputs to support the sector interpret the results and turn those insights into action. Participants had used existing CaSE research in:

- **Political influencing:** CaSE's statistics had been widely used to engage policymakers. In particular, the provision of data in easily accessible formats, regional breakdowns and the constituency-level analysis during the 2024 General Election period had all been invaluable.
- **External engagement:** Participants had used the research outputs to inform external communications and engagement. This included in a redesign of an institution's public facing website and in choosing messaging that would resonate with broad audiences.
- **Internal strategies:** Participants had used the research to challenge internal thinking, to inform strategy development and as training tools and support for colleagues or researchers. Others had used evidence of public appetite for more information about R&D to make the case internally for engagement activities to be prioritised.

To maximise the usefulness of the research results from the tracker, participants suggested:

- **Alignment with priorities:** Participants wanted to see content tailored for different issue areas (e.g. the Labour Government's missions), disciplines or sectors. The value of geographic or demographic breakdowns were emphasised by most participants.
- **Customisation and self-service:** Many participants expressed an interest in data dashboards or the ability to generate their own customised reports based on the research, to efficiently serve the diverse interests and needs of the R&D sector.
- **Support to interpret research data:** Many participants had welcomed direct engagement with the CaSE team and felt this had helped them get the most out of the results. There was appetite for specific guidance for different users, including those in policy, public engagement, communications and fundraising roles and researchers.
- **Engaging and digestible content:** Participants wanted more infographics to help convey the research methods and findings, as well as a wider use of interactive charts and presentations. Data visualisations that could be copied and pasted would also be helpful.
- **Layered approach to information:** Participants welcomed the different levels of information available, from top line facts and one-page briefings to detailed results write ups and data tables. However, participants were keen for outputs that offered more detail than a page, but less than the full write-up. Some participants were unaware that data tables were available to download for all studies.
- **Opportunities to learn and discuss:** Participants wanted the opportunity to learn about the research findings and supported more webinars or presentations from the CaSE team, including to regional or professional networks. There was also appetite for CaSE to convene the sector to discuss the implications of the research and how they could act on this.

**If you would like to contribute ideas to this project  
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