

Public Attitudes to R&D and Universities

This briefing summarises public attitudes to R&D and universities. It is based on evidence from extensive quantitative and qualitative research carried out by CaSE since 2022. Full results can be found on [CaSE's Public Opinion Research pages](#).

Universities' role in UK R&D is not instinctively clear

- When prompted, 64% say they associate universities with R&D, second only to the UK Government (65%) (July 2025).
- However, universities are rarely front of mind without prompting. Focus group participants consistently see R&D as an ancillary activity and do not have a clear sense of the scale of the R&D workforce.
- Qualitative research suggests university R&D is perceived to be collaborative, global, altruistic and blue skies, but slower to deliver results than private sector R&D.

"I knew about the University of Essex, because my niece went there, so I did know about it, but I didn't know exactly that they did all of the research there. I knew they had students there, but I didn't know about the research side of things."

Female, 45-54, Clacton

Universities are well trusted and seen in a positive light

- 77% trust information on R&D from universities and 72% trust universities to be honest about how much money the Government should invest in R&D (July 2025).
- Around half of people think universities have a positive impact on the UK and their local area, and that they produce high quality R&D. (June 2024)

As local anchor institutions, universities can build on strong public appetite for more information and involvement with R&D

- 74% say they knew hardly anything or nothing about R&D in their local area, but 70% agreed they would like to hear more (July 2025).
- 77% say that researchers should engage more with the public about the social and ethical implications of their research, and around 4 in 10 say they would be personally interested in co-design or participation in research (July 2025).
- Focus group participants express more interest in universities offering outreach activities into communities than in the public visiting the university.