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U.K. Has Positive View Of Chemistry

Survey: British say benefits of the science outweigh harm

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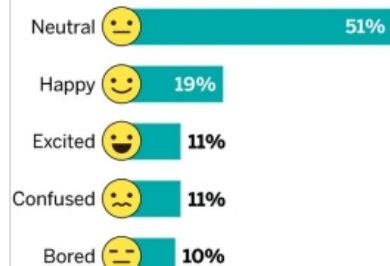
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Feelings towards chemistry (%)



NOTE: Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one category.
SOURCE: Royal Society of Chemistry

BRITISH ATTITUDES

2,104 U.K. adults were asked: "Which of the following describes how you feel about chemistry".

A Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) **survey on attitudes toward chemistry** in the U.K. has found that a majority of the general public is neutral about the subject, yet generally positive about the industry's impacts. The findings surprised U.K. chemists as more than half thought that the majority of survey respondents would say all chemicals are harmful.

When asked, only one-third of U.K. chemists thought that the public would have a positive view of their discipline. But the survey found that 59% of the public believes the benefits of chemistry outweigh the harm. Moreover, 79% of the British public believes chemistry contributes to society.

By way of comparison, **a survey conducted in 2000 by the American Chemical Society**—the publisher of C&EN—found one-third of U.S. survey respondents had an unfavorable opinion of chemical companies.

A panel convened by RSC noted that U.S. survey data may vary because drugstore pharmacists in the U.S. are known as "chemists"

in the U.K. The benefits of drug discovery and medicine are more strongly associated with the chemical enterprise than areas such as materials science and energy, they said.

A series of eight focus groups held as part of the U.K. survey revealed that low levels of engagement with chemistry may stem from people's school-aged experience with chemistry classes. When asked to rank their current engagement with or interest in chemistry, 43% of the public gave a low score.

The RSC panel of chemistry communications experts encouraged chemists to be ambassadors to broaden scientific literacy, share their enthusiasm, and promote public funding for chemistry research.

To maintain the public's trust, chemists also must step up and take responsibility when there is a fire, explosion, or health problem caused by or related to chemistry, they said. Lower levels of trust (60%) were associated with chemists employed by industry in the U.K. than other sectors.

Panelists concluded by noting that the neutral attitude of the U.K. public means the field is wide open for better communications about the excitement and benefits of chemistry.

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