SMC 2020 evaluation survey summary

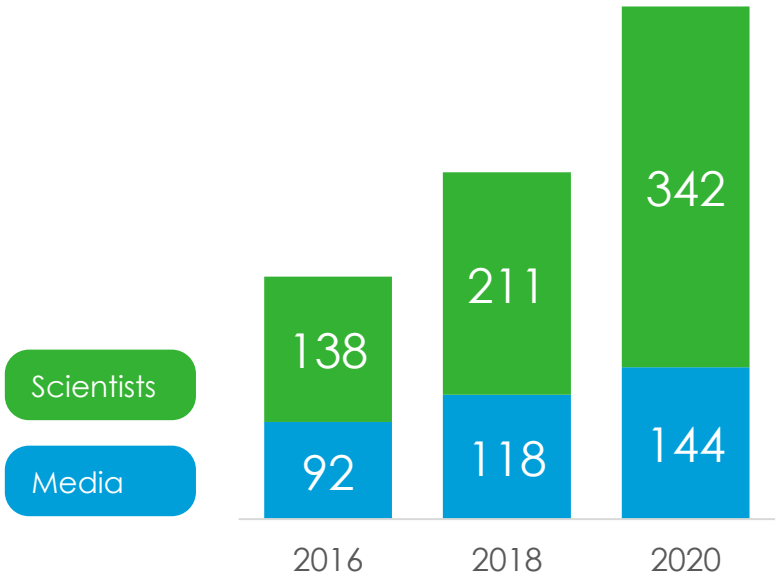
This document outlines key results from the Science Media Centre's stakeholder surveys that are relevant to the Centre's stated objectives.

In January 2020 we surveyed New Zealand media professionals and researchers who had worked with the Science Media Centre (SMC). This follows from similar stakeholder surveys conducted in 2016 and 2018.

For our media survey, we contacted all media professionals who: received email alerts from the SMC, contacted the SMC with a media query, or attended a SMC workshop. A total of 937 media professionals were invited to take the survey, and 144 (15%) completed the survey.

For our scientists' survey, we contacted all researchers who attended a SMC workshop or provided commentary to the SMC for our Expert Reaction alerts (a new segment in 2020). A total of 1,485 researchers were invited to take the survey, and 342 (23%) completed the survey.

Survey respondents 2016-2020



Objective 1: Enhance the depth and breadth of media coverage of science relevance to society.

Performance indicator: Media outlets are using SMC-derived content and experts in their science coverage.

Journalists say the SMC is making a difference: 89% of the media professionals we surveyed agree the SMC has an impact on the way science is covered in the media and 93% agree that the SMC makes it easier to for them to cover a broader range of science-related issues.

Journalists who had contacted the SMC looking for experts to comment on a story said contacts provided were 'relevant' (90% selected this option), 'knowledgeable' (86%) and 'willing to engage' (77%).

89% Media say the SMC has an **impact** on science coverage

93% Media say the SMC helps them cover a **broader range of issues**

Experts suggested by the SMC...

- Relevant
- Knowledgeable
- Willing to engage

Objective 2: Ensure science is accessible to media

Performance indicator:
registered journalists have access to scientific information for use in reporting.

The overwhelming majority of journalists agreed that the SMC is useful to, and valued by New Zealand media (98% and 93% agreed respectively).

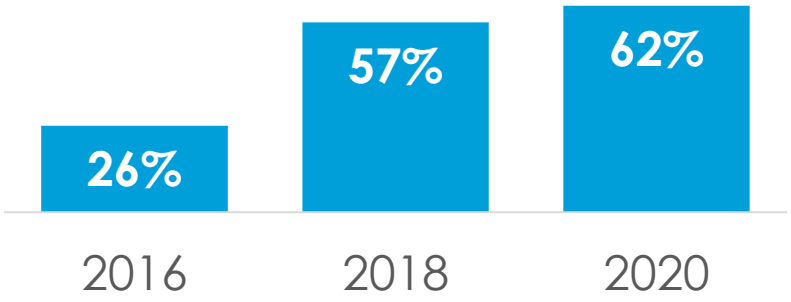
More journalists are accessing SMC resources regularly; 62% of those surveyed said they use SMC resources at least once a week, an increase on 2018 (57%) and 2016 (26%).

The most used resources were Expert Reactions (79% had used), SMC Picks (twice-weekly embargoed research tipsheet; 70%) and the media query hotline (69%).

97% Media say the SMC is **useful**

93% Media say the SMC is **valued**

More journalists are accessing SMC resources at least once a week



Objective 3: Enable scientists and research organisations to work effectively with the media

Performance indicator: Workshop participants are more confident working with the media.

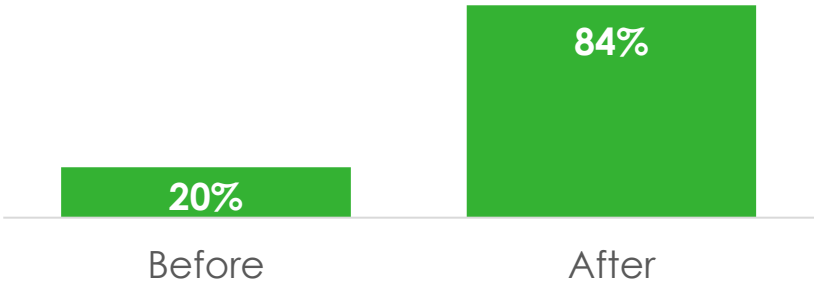
The SMC's Science Media SAVVY workshops boost scientists' confidence in interacting with the media.

Nearly all researchers (95%) who attended a workshop agreed that they were able to communicate their research more effectively due to the workshop.

We asked survey participants to give an indication of their media confidence before and after the workshops. Only one in five (20%) felt confident before the workshop, but more than four in five (84%) said they were confident after.

95% Communicating research more effectively due to training

More scientists are confident responding to media after workshop



Objective 4: Encourage responsible and insightful reporting from journalists

Performance indicator: Journalists are more confident covering a broader range of issues.

The SMC's 'Spotting Bad Science' newsroom workshops have an impact on journalists covering science. Two-thirds of journalists (64%) who attended one of the SMC's 'Spotting Bad Science' newsroom workshops agreed the workshop influenced the way journalists at their organisation cover science (and none disagreed). 82% agreed that other journalists would find the workshops useful.

Journalists said the workshops improved 'understanding different types of scientific evidence' (75% selected this option), 'identifying red flags' (58%), and 'evaluating scientific claims' (58%).

Three quarters (76%) of all journalists surveyed said that they were confident covering a broad range of science-related issues (new question in 2020).

63% Media say workshops influenced **how science is covered**

Top workshop skills

- Understanding evidence
- Spotting 'red flags'
- Evaluating claims

76% Media confident covering a **broad range** of science issues

Objective 5: Establish links between the science system and the media

Performance indicator: The SMC fosters linkages and cooperation between science organisations and the media.

Over half (51%) the journalists who had been offered expert suggestions by the SMC for a specific story said these contacts were 'useful on an ongoing basis'.

The majority of researchers (72%) who participated in a Science Media SAVVY workshop rated their experiences interacting with the media after the workshop as positive (26% neutral and only 3% negative).

Journalists also take part in SAVVY workshops, providing feedback to participants as part of a panel. Most (80%) workshop media panellists said they had further contact with researchers resulting in media coverage, and 81% said 'contacts I made will be valuable over the long term'.

Over three-quarters (77%) of the researchers who provided expert commentary to the SMC said the process was easy. The majority (87%) said it was a good use of their time and 89% rated their subsequent interactions with the media as positive.

72% Scientists report **positive interactions with media** after workshops

80% Media have **further contact** with scientists after workshops

89% Scientists report **positive interactions with media** after providing commentary to SMC

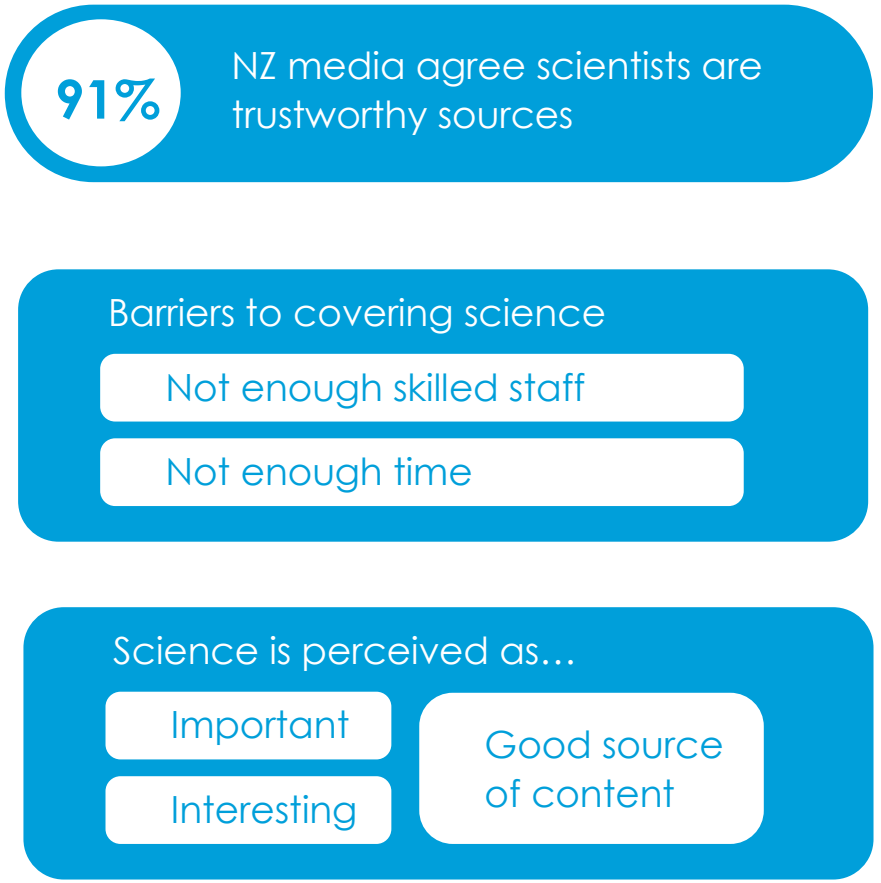
Media perceptions of science

New Zealand media trust scientists: 91% percent of respondents agreed with the statement 'Journalists in New Zealand consider scientists to be trustworthy sources.'

A third (33%) of respondents said they were producing science stories at least weekly—a decrease from previous years.

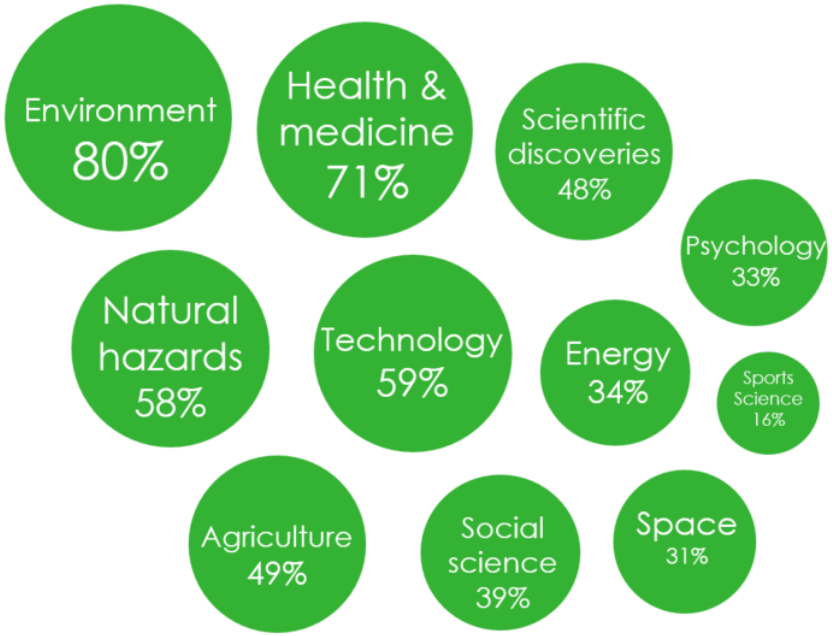
When asked about potential barriers to covering science, the reasons most often selected by journalists were: 'Not enough staff skilled/comfortable in covering science' (51%) and 'Not enough time' (54%). Only one in ten (10%) selected 'Lack of interesting science news and stories' as a barrier.

We also asked them how they would characterise the way science is usually perceived, offering them a range of descriptors. 'Important' (68%), 'Interesting' (65%) and 'Good source of content' (56%) were most commonly selected options, while very few chose 'Inaccessible' (6%) or 'Irrelevant' (1%).



Media perceptions of science

We asked journalists which areas of science interested their audience. The top four selected categories were: environment (80% selected); health and medicine (71%); technology and innovation (59%); and, natural hazards (58%). Space (31%) and sports science (16%) were the least selected categories.



Decision-makers

We also posed some questions to newsroom decision-makers. Among this subgroup, 27% said their organisation is likely to increase resourcing for science and related rounds in 2020—and none said decreases were likely. 45% said their audience's interest in science content was increasing over time. Only 3% said it was decreasing.

45% Say their audience's **interest in science is increasing**

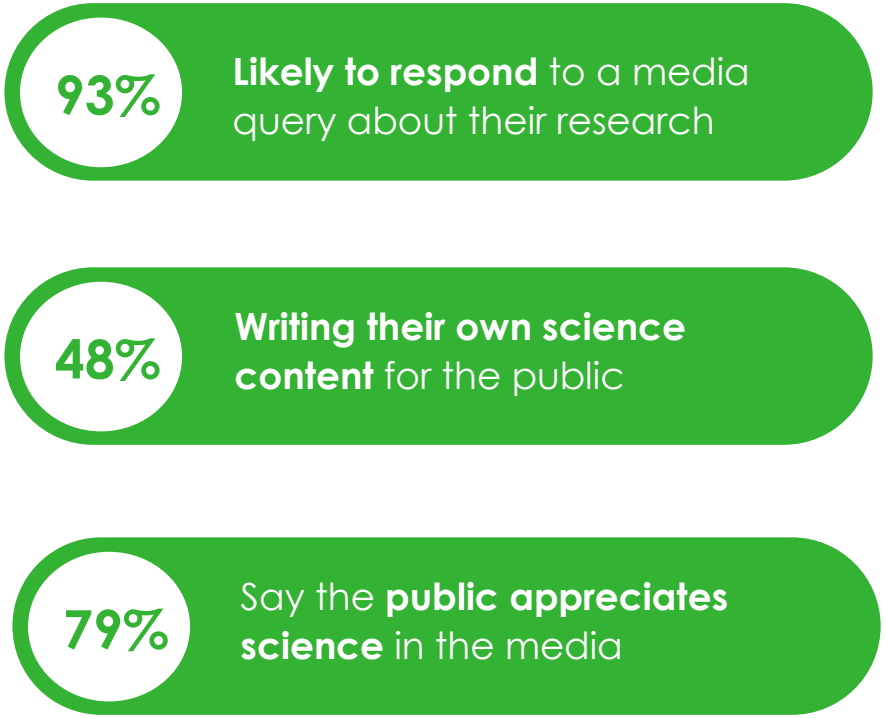
Scientists' perceptions of media

The majority of researchers surveyed agreed that, if approached by the media they would be: likely to respond (93%), feel prepared (84%), and confident (77%).

Three quarters (77%) reported having a media interaction in the last six months. Almost half (48%) said they had written their own articles for a public audience (e.g., contributing to online publications such as *Newsroom* or *The Conversation*).

Some of the scientists we surveyed had reservations about the media; 57% agreed with the statement 'The mainstream media often misrepresents science'.

However, most (79%) agreed that the public appreciates scientific content in the mainstream media.



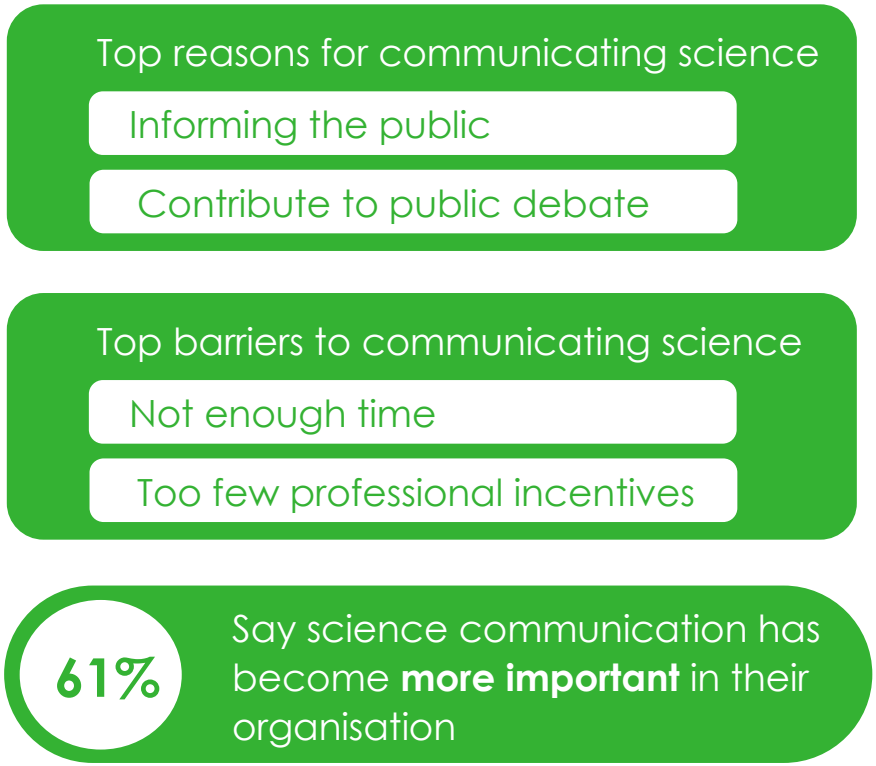
Scientists' perceptions of media

We also asked researchers how much they agreed with range of reasons for, and barriers to, engaging in public science communication.

The top reasons for communicating science were: 'To ensure the public is better informed about science and technology' (96% agreed), 'To contribute to public debate about science and scientific issues' (91%), and 'To raise awareness about my subject' (90%).

The top barriers were: 'I don't have enough time' (69% agreed) and 'There are too few professional incentives' (45%).

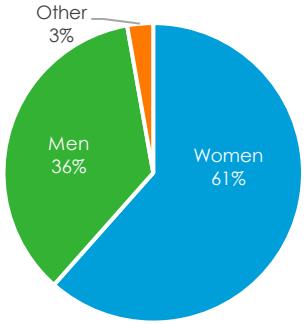
When asked if their own organisation's views on public engagement had changed in recent years, 61% of researchers said communicating research to the public had become more important (and only 3% said it was viewed as less important).



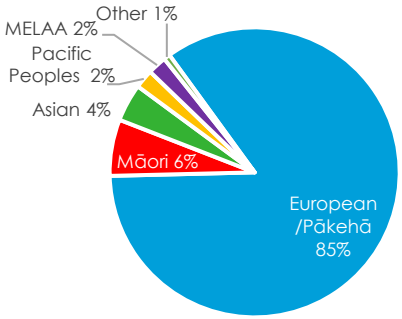
Demographics

Media

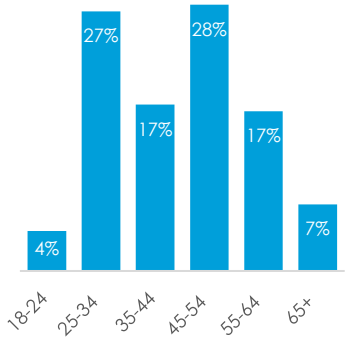
Gender



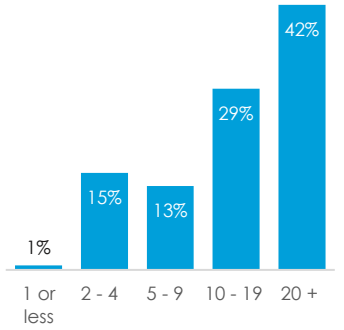
Ethnicity



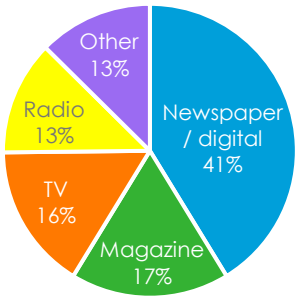
Age



Years' experience



Employer



Scientists

Gender

Ethnicity

Age

Years' experience

Employer