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Department
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Policy paper

2010 to 2015 government policy: public understanding of science and engineering

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This is a copy of a document that stated a policy of the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. The previous URL of this page was <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/engaging-the-public-in-science-and-engineering--3>. Current policies can be found at the GOV.UK [policies list](#).

Issue

Science and research are major contributors to the prosperity of the UK. For our prosperity to continue, the government believes we need high levels of skills in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), and citizens that value them.

Actions

To engage the public in science and engineering we:

- hold the British Science Festival and the National Science and Engineering Week, [events that promote science and raise the public's awareness of science issues](#)
- [fund the work of 4 independent national academies](#):
 - [Royal Society](#)___
 - [British Academy](#)___
 - [Royal Academy of Engineering](#)___
 - [Academy of Medical Sciences](#)___
- [make science and engineering policy decisions that are informed by monitoring public opinion](#)
- encourage science in schools and [fund programmes and events that](#)


[inspire students to study STEM subjects](#)

Background

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) undertook a [review of the Science and Society Programme](#) in 2012, working with:

- the science community
- business
- educators
- media
- civil society groups

Two important messages emerged:

- target new audiences: public participation with science in general is gaining momentum but the current audience is largely already interested in science, there is a collective need to do more to take science to those not currently involved 
- interact with people where they naturally congregate, rather than expecting them to come to us

BIS led development of a [Charter for Science and Society in the UK](#), to achieve the common aims developed through the review. We have launched the [Community Challenge Grant Scheme](#) as part of our commitment to this Charter. You can view the [successful applicants for the 2014 to 2015 scheme](#).

This latest review and follow on activity builds on the work done in 2008 when the department ran the consultation '[Vision for science and society](#)' to find out how we should develop science skills, improve science communication and build public confidence in science.



Appendix 1: making informed science policy decisions

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

To make sure that science policy made by government is both relevant to the public and based on expert advice we fund Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre and the public attitudes to science survey.

Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre

BIS funds the [Sciencewise](#) Expert Resource Centre for Public Dialogue in Science and Innovation that helps two-way communication between policy makers, scientists, the public or both.

It is a comprehensive online resource of information, advice and guidance together with a wide range of support services aimed at policy makers and people involved in science and technology policy making, including the public.

Sciencewise also provides funding to government departments and agencies to develop and commission communication with the public.

Public Attitudes to Science survey

BIS, and its predecessors, have funded 5 Public Attitudes to Science surveys since 2000.

The [results of all the surveys have been published](#) and are used to measure the success of government's science and society work and to identify areas that we should work on in future.

Appendix 2: raising public awareness of science, engineering and technology

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

The government wants to create a culture where people feel science, engineering and technology are relevant to them.

We believe the best way of doing this is to show the public how these subjects affect their lives and to get them talking about science, engineering and technology.

British Science Festival

The [British Science Festival](#) is one of Europe's largest celebrations of science, engineering and technology with over 250 events, activities, exhibitions and trips taking place each September.

Events at the festival offer something for everyone, with activities for families, schools, adults and science professionals interested in the latest scientific research.

National Science and Engineering Week

[National Science and Engineering week](#) is a 10-day programme of around 4,500 science, engineering and technology events across the UK, aimed at people of all ages.

It is funded by BIS working in partnership with Engineering UK.

There are no restrictions on who can organise events, the topics they choose, the audience or the venue.

Community Challenge Grant Scheme

This [grant scheme](#) offers financial support to individuals and organisations, to create and run pilot projects which take science to diverse audiences, and engage them with science in their own communities.

Appendix 3: funding national academies

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

The UK's 4 independent national academies provide leadership and encourage excellence across all fields of UK science and engineering, to the benefit of society:



- [Royal Society](#) - UK's national academy of science
- [British Academy](#) - promotes the humanities and social science
- [Royal Academy of Engineering](#) - UK's national academy of engineering
- [Academy of Medical Sciences](#) – promotes medical science and its translation into benefits for society

Government has allocated funding for national academy programmes and projects in the [2011 to 2015](#) and [2015 to 2016](#) science budgets. This is:

- enabling the most capable academics to work full-time on research, which helps maintain excellence in the UK research base and secures future economic returns from our investment in science and research
- developing research links and collaborations with the best researchers overseas - particularly in regions of importance to the UK
- inspiring students to study and take up careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), and promotes diversity in the STEM workforce
- encouraging the public to take an interest in science, technology and engineering issues
- supporting the provision of authoritative and impartial advice on a broad range of science, engineering and research issues, which helps shape government policies

Appendix 4: inspiring students to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics

This was a supporting detail page of the main policy document.

The government believes that if we want the UK to remain a world leader in research and technology we will need a future generation that is passionate about, and skilled in, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

Your Life

[Your Life](#) is a 3-year campaign aiming to help young adults in the UK to get the maths and science skills needed to succeed in the current competitive global economy. We will do this by inspiring young people to study maths and physics as an opening to exciting and wide-ranging careers. It will also help employers recruit and keep talent, particularly women. Your Life connects existing initiatives together into 1 effective campaign, with 3 big objectives:

1. change the way young people think about maths and science by raising awareness of the exciting and wide-ranging careers that studying these subjects can lead to
2. increase participation in maths and science studies at age 16 and beyond with an ambitious target to increase the number of students studying maths and physics at A level by 50% in 3 years
3. increase the opportunities for all people and particularly women to pursue a wide range of careers that need skills in science, technology, engineering and maths

In November 2014, Your Life is speaking directly to young people through a [national media campaign and in schools across the country](#). We are giving young people the opportunity to be involved with the campaign and its partners through social media, competitions and events.

STEMNET

The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network, [STEMNET](#), is a UK-wide organisation set up to inspire young people to take an interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Studying STEM subjects helps young people to develop their creativity, problem-solving and technical skills, and makes them better able to make informed decisions about STEM issues.

STEMNET runs 3 programmes:

- STEM ambassadors: 28,000 volunteers who provide a free resource for teachers helping them provide the STEM curriculum in fresh and innovative ways
- STEM clubs network: clubs that allow children to explore, investigate and discover STEM subjects outside of the school timetable and curriculum
- schools STEM advisory network: 45 organisations across the country that offer impartial advice to schools on how they can help get students into further STEM education, training and employment

STEMNET receives funding from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department for Education.

National Science and Engineering Competition

The [National Science and Engineering Competition](#) is open to all 11 to 18 year-olds living in the UK and in full-time education. It rewards students who have achieved excellence in a STEM project.

The aim of the competition is to recognise and reward young people's achievements in all areas of STEM and encourage others to become interested in STEM subjects.

The [British Science Association](#) coordinates the competition in partnership with [The Big Bang Fair](#) and [Young Engineers](#).

The Big Bang Fair

[The Big Bang](#) is the largest celebration of STEM for young people in the UK and is aimed at showing 7 to 19 year-olds just how many exciting and rewarding opportunities there are for people interested in STEM subjects.

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