

# Policy Priorities Survey 2024

## Summary

As a trusted and authoritative voice, the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) aims to ensure that chemistry has a recognised and influential role in science and society. One of our aims is to influence decision makers in areas that impact the chemical sciences, via our policy work. As part of periodic reviews of our policy programme, in June 2024 we sent out a survey seeking views from our members on our existing work areas – **environmental sustainability; inclusion, diversity, accessibility and culture in science; discovery, research and innovation; chemistry policy in the education sector, and chemical waste and pollution**. These work areas have been informed by results of our [2021 Policy Priorities Survey](#). To offer our members the opportunity to help shape our future public policy work, respondents could also share their opinions on pressing issues facing the chemical sciences community.

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the survey. The results have been important for developing our priority policy themes for 2025-29, which the relevant RSC Governance bodies endorsed in autumn 2024. The survey showed that members considered all the topics in the 2022-24 policy programme important, so they will continue into the 2025-29 programme, alongside a few new topics and themes many respondents considered important for the future. We have developed a policy programme for 2025-29, with policy topics fitting within the RSC's Voice and Influence strategy:

1. ***A strategic approach to the management of chemicals and resources for a robust and sustainable economy.***
  - a. Sustainable chemicals policy
  - b. Chemistry and circular economy
  - c. Tackling pollution
2. ***A world-class chemistry education for all.***
  - a. A relevant and adequately resourced curriculum
  - b. Empowered expert school and college workforce
  - c. Accessible routes and equitable pathways
3. ***An ambitious, inclusive, and stable R&D and skills policy environment for UK science and innovation to drive economic growth.***
  - a. Sustainable research and innovation funding
  - b. An inclusive science culture
  - c. Chemistry workforce and skills
  - d. Post-secondary chemistry education, including financial sustainability in higher education

We will also be focusing several cross-cutting themes, which intersect several of our policy topics: chemistry and net zero; supply chains for chemistry sectors including alternatives to fossil hydrocarbons; chemistry and economic growth; chemistry and industrial strategy, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

This report presents this year's results in more detail, including visualisations of the data for ease of interpretation. At the end of the report, you can find a summary of our next steps and an outline of our policy programme for 2025-29.

If you have further questions or would like to learn more about how to get involved, please get in touch via [policy@rsc.org](mailto:policy@rsc.org).

## Introduction

As a trusted and authoritative voice, the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) aims to ensure that chemistry has a recognised and influential role in science and society. One of our aims is to influence decision makers in areas that impact the chemical sciences, via our policy work. 'Policy work' is when we advise decision-makers, for example Government and Parliamentarians, on **decisions related to the chemical sciences**. We provide expert information and gather evidence to keep policy makers and the public informed and up to date on current scientific, education and global issues. We engage in policy decisions that impact on the quality of chemistry practised in a variety of contexts and careers, and that affect the quality of chemistry education at all levels.

In June 2024, we sent out a survey seeking views from our members on what their priorities were within our existing work areas – **environmental sustainability; inclusion, diversity, accessibility and culture in science; discovery, research and innovation; chemistry policy in the education sector, and chemical waste and pollution**. These work areas have been informed by results of our [2021 Policy Priorities Survey](#).

We would like to thank everyone who responded to the survey. The results have been an important consideration in developing the RSC's priority policy themes for 2025 to 2029, which the relevant RSC Governance bodies have recently endorsed.

The key survey results are presented here, please see the Annex for more detailed data. At the end of the report, you can find a summary of our next steps and an outline of our policy programme for 2025-29.

## Survey results and discussion

### Demographics

This year's survey went live in June 2024 and closed in July. The survey was sent out to over 45,000 unique email addresses. In total, we received 1,193 responses, with a response rate of 2.5%, compared to 3.3% in 2021. Although not all respondents answered every question, there was enough information to analyse and draw meaningful conclusions. All data was completely anonymised.

Of the 1,193 responders, 82% are RSC members, and most respondents (77%) are based in the UK (see visualisations in Annex). Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of respondents by work sector and career stage.

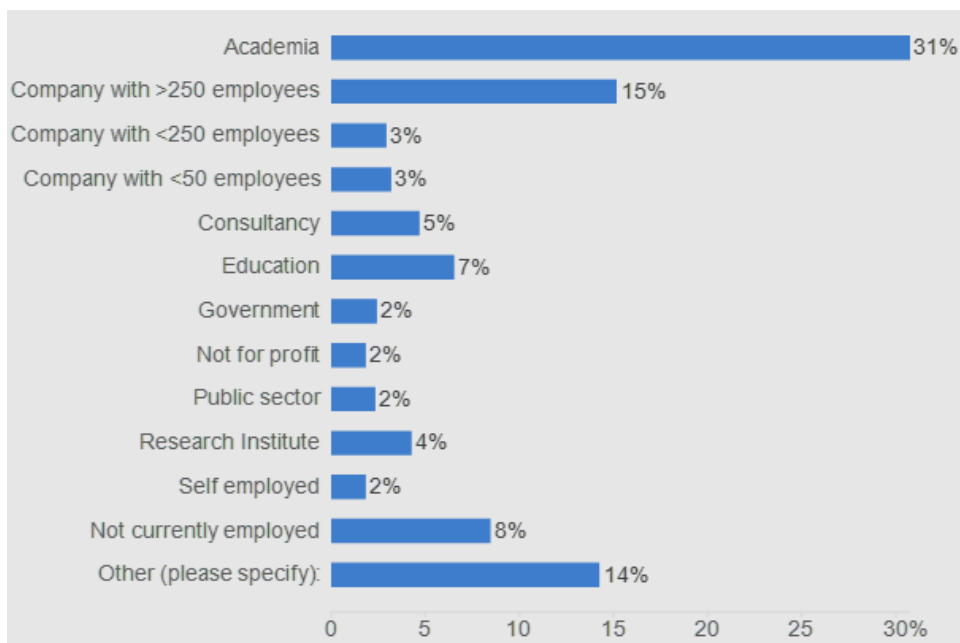


Figure 1: Breakdown of responses by work sector. Responses: 1193.

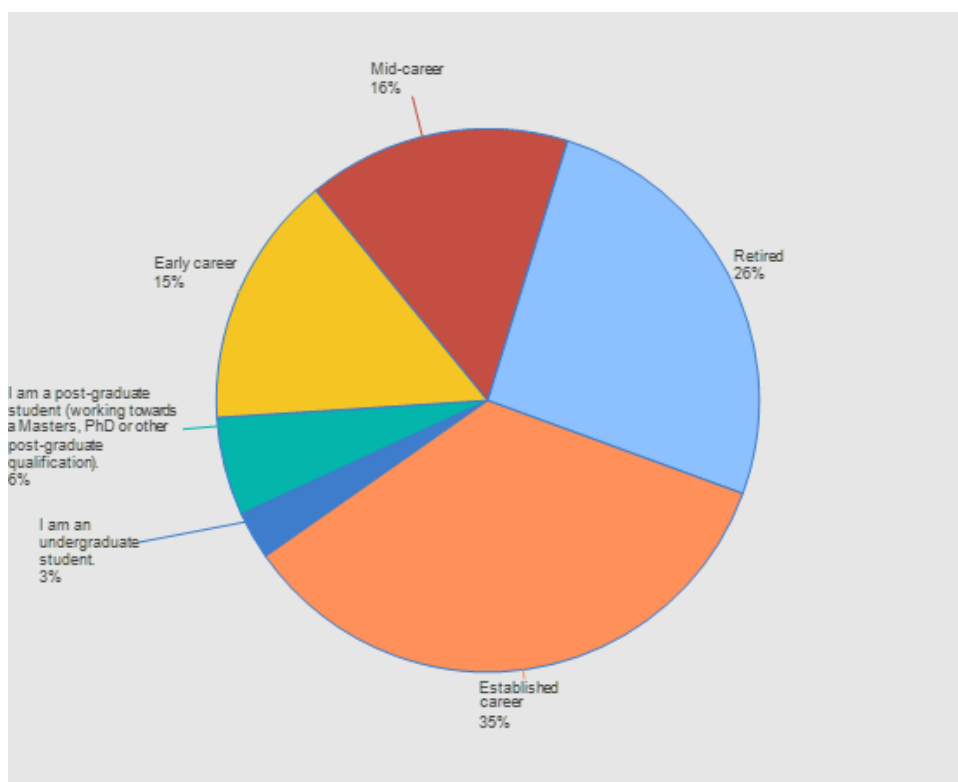


Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents by career stage. Responses: 1193.

## Policy priorities questions

### Question 9: How important do you think it is for the RSC to aim to influence each of the following aspects of public policy?

To find out which policy issues from our 2022-24 programme were most important to members, survey respondents were asked to consider each area of our current public policy work. Respondents rated each policy topic by importance, from 'very important', 'important', 'neutral', 'unimportant', or 'very unimportant'. Respondents also had the opportunity to select 'don't know' if they weren't sure. The results are presented in Figure 3.

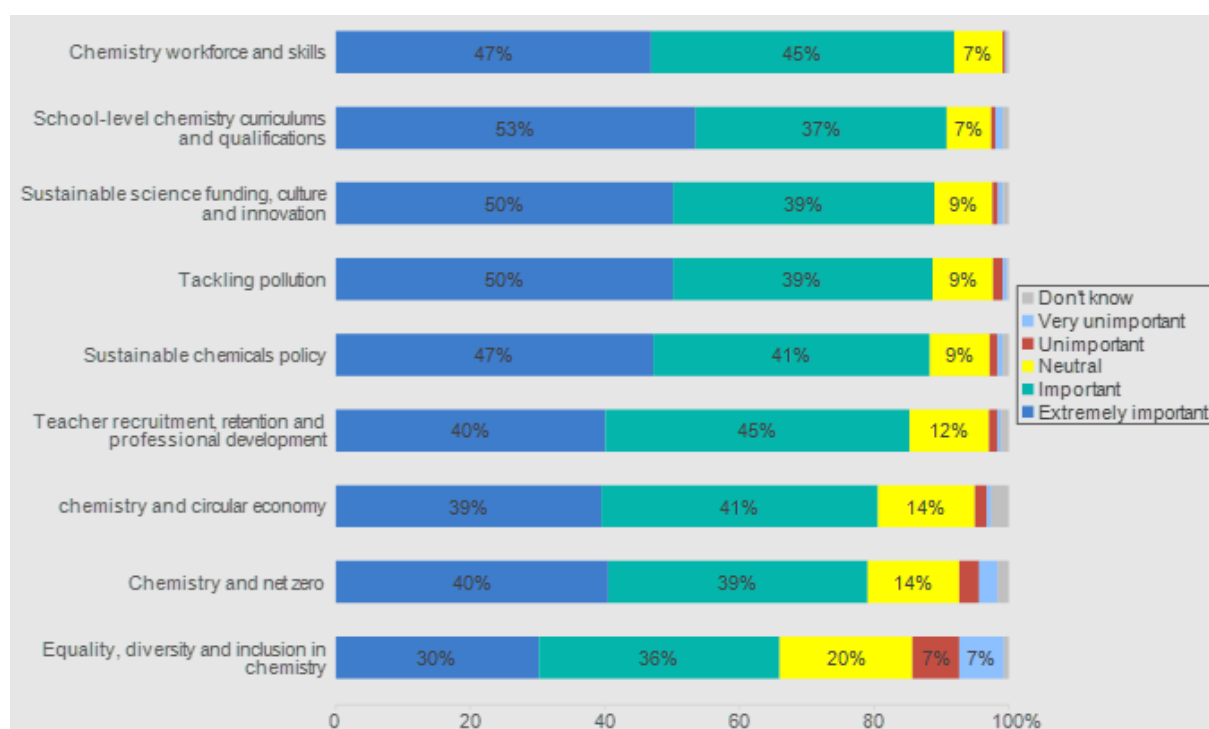


Figure 3: Responses to Question 9, where respondents rated the importance of areas of our public policy work. Ordered by greatest number of 'extremely important' and 'important' responses combined. Responses: 1193.

All areas of current public policy work are considered important or very important by most respondents. Overall, **chemistry workforce and skills** and **school-level chemistry curricula and qualifications** were most important to respondents, but all other policy areas followed closely. There were some notable differences in priorities by career stage and work sector.

Chemistry workforce and skills was most important for every career stage except retirees, who prioritised school-level chemistry and curricula. For those in academia, sustainable science funding, culture and innovation was considered most important. Topics including chemistry and circular economy and chemistry and net zero had a considerable number of 'neutral' and 'don't know' responses, especially amongst retirees. Results indicate that our work on equality, diversity and inclusion in chemistry is especially important to academics and those in the earlier stages of their careers.

Some respondents chose to elaborate on their answer to question 9. Many respondents feel that climate change is the most pressing issue, and they would like to see even more policy work on global environmental challenges - particularly pollution, waste, and global warming. Thus, it will be important to engage with members who are interested in these topics, for example through relevant interest groups and inform them on policy work relating to these issues.

Others expressed that the RSC's policy work should instead focus more on chemistry workforce topics, such as skills and professional development. Many reiterated their support for education policy work, emphasising the importance of recruiting and retaining qualified chemistry teachers alongside strong chemistry curricula across all levels of education. With funding cuts and department closures, many shared concerns about the financial stability of higher education and research in the UK.

**Question 10: Other than the topics listed in the previous question, what do you think will be the most important issue for the chemical sciences community in 2025-30 that political decision-makers need to act upon?**

To offer our members the opportunity to help shape our future public policy work, respondents were asked to select the most pressing issue facing the chemical sciences community that calls for the attention of policymakers. Respondents were also given the opportunity to select 'other' and share their views in more depth. The results are presented in Figure 4.

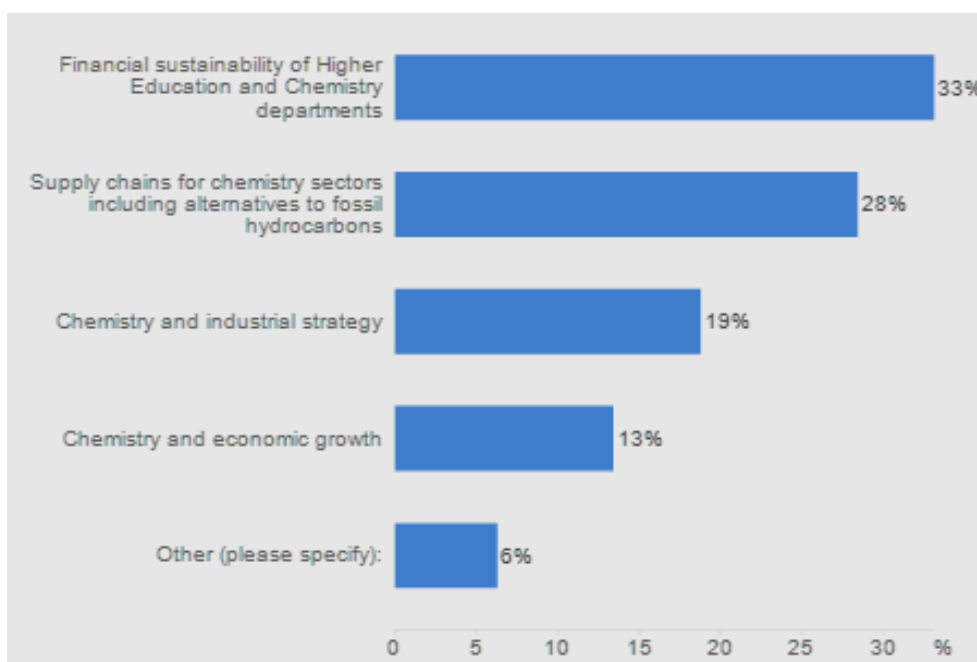


Figure 4: Responses to Question 10, where respondents were asked to select the most important issue (other than those listed in question 9) faced by the chemical sciences community, that political decision-makers should act upon in 2025-3030. Responses: 1193.

According to respondents, **financial stability of Higher Education and Chemistry departments** and **supply chains for chemistry sectors including alternatives to hydrocarbons** are the most pressing issues facing the chemical sciences community that need to be addressed by political decision-makers. There was some variation in views by career stage: students and early careers felt that supply chains for chemistry sectors are the most important issue, whilst all other career stages felt that financial stability of higher education and Chemistry departments should be prioritised. There was also some variation by work sector. For example, those in education and academia prioritise financial stability of higher education, whilst consultants tend to prioritise chemistry and economic growth.

For those that selected 'other', there was the opportunity to share their views on important policy topics in more detail. A significant number of respondents expressed that environmental issues such as sustainability, global warming, climate change, energy, and waste should be prioritised. Our members would like to see the RSC more publicly showcase positive developments in chemical sciences research and advocate for the importance of chemists in society. The 2024 Members Survey results support this notion: 89% of those surveyed feel proud to be a member of the RSC, for several reasons including the RSC's commitment to environmental sustainability. As in question 9, these topics already make up a significant part of our current public policy work. Many respondents also had concerns about the stability and management of higher education establishments. Furthermore, some respondents felt that research infrastructure and quality of research was most important and highlighted international collaboration and competition to be pressing issues.

**Question 11: *What action will policy-makers need to take on the issue / challenge you named in the previous question to enable the chemical sciences community to make the world a better place? If possible, please specify the actions and the policy maker(s).***

The purpose of this question was to understand respondents' opinions about the role of policy in combating some of the biggest challenges facing the chemical sciences community. Responses will help shape the way the Policy & Evidence and Parliamentary Affairs teams work over the next 5 years. Our members' views are important to us and will influence how we engage with decision-makers and other stakeholders. Prevalent themes include economic growth, industrial strategy and supply chains, education and skills, funding and stability of higher education, research infrastructure, as well as a broad range of environmental issues.

We received valuable feedback across many policy topics, with most responses referring to the policy issues already covered in questions 9 and 10. Many respondents highlighted the role of chemistry in tackling environmental challenges, with strong support for decarbonisation and a just transition to net zero. There was widespread support for resource efficiency, recycling, and the reduction of supply chain lengths, in working towards a circular economy.

The feedback highlights strong support for the integration of financial sustainability, workforce skills and supply chains into our policy work, with industrial strategy seen as a unifying principle. Within the discussion on skills, respondents' feedback varied, with some emphasizing practical work experience, while others stressed the need for deeper chemistry knowledge in education. Financial sustainability of higher education was widely discussed, with suggestions ranging from increased STEM funding to practical education enhancements and tuition fee adjustments. Views varied on how best to allocate resources, with some advocating for more funding across the sector, especially for science, while others favoured concentrating resources in fewer universities. The inclusion of international students in immigration figures was another contentious issue, with calls to either exclude them or shift focus to domestic recruitment. Additionally, there was a sense of opposition to market-driven approaches in universities, with some supporting a cap on student numbers to ensure fair distribution of resources.

Research funding and infrastructure is seen as a major challenge to the chemical sciences in the UK. Respondents emphasised the need for more secure R&D funding, which would generate substantial returns on investments and drive economic growth over the medium and long term. Many would also like to see greater international collaboration through joint research endeavours with other nations. They feel this - along with stable, long-term investment in R&D - would strengthen the economy and boost international competitiveness, in chemistry and beyond. Geopolitical concerns, particularly around the UK's relationship with the EU, also featured prominently with many calling for a return to closer regulatory alignment with the EU. Finally, there were suggestions on how the RSC could influence policy, from informing policymakers to advocating for greater scientific presence in political office.

## RSC role and importance question

### Question 17: Our policy and campaign work involves the following activities. How important do you consider the RSC's role to be?

The purpose of this question was to find out our members' views on the importance of the main activities the RSC engages in to inform and influence public policy. Respondents were asked to consider nine different activities that we engage in as part of our policy and campaign work. Respondents were required to rate each activity by importance, from 'very important', 'important', 'neutral', 'unimportant', and 'very unimportant'. Respondents could also select 'don't know' if they weren't sure. The results are presented in Figure 5.

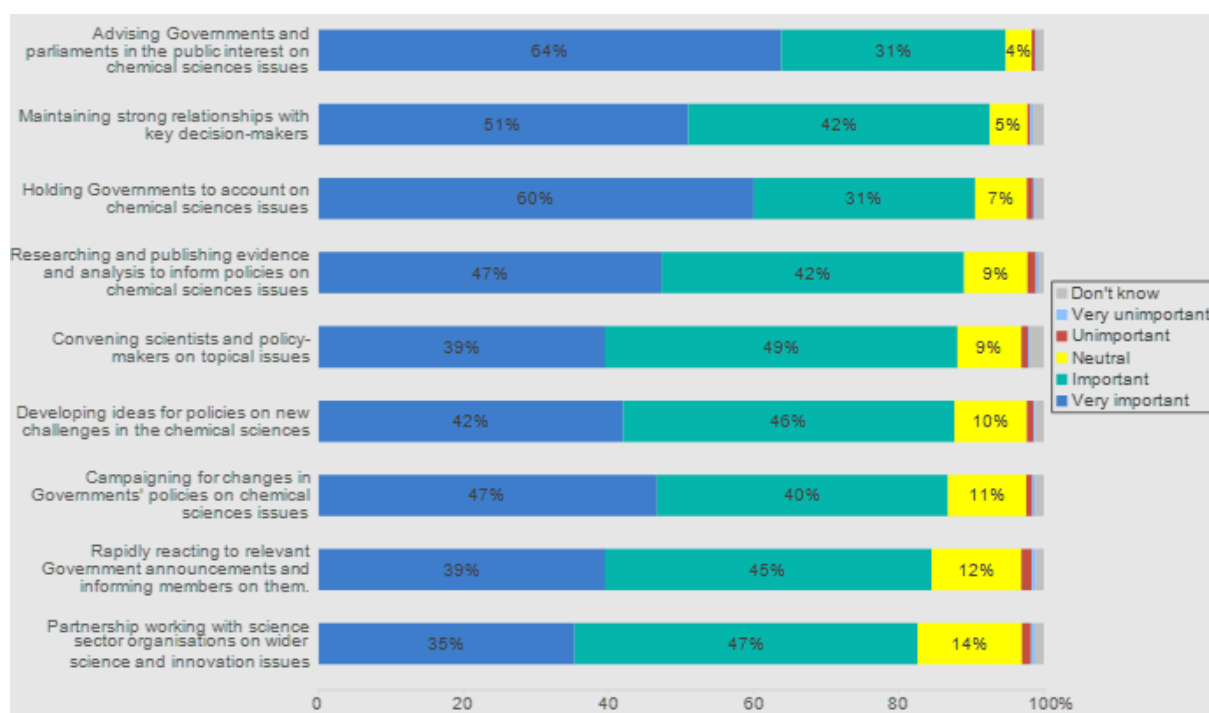


Figure 5: Responses to Question 17, where respondents were asked to rate the importance of different activities that fall under our policy and campaign work. Ordered by number of 'very important' and 'important' responses combined. Responses: 1193.

The results indicate that most respondents consider the RSC's role in the above policy-related activities to be 'very important' or 'important'. **Advising Governments and parliaments in the public interest on chemical sciences issues** and **holding Governments to account on chemical sciences issues** had the greatest percentage 'very important' responses (64% and 60%, respectively). **Maintaining strong relationships with key decision-makers** was also prioritised, with 51% of respondents selecting 'very important'. There were no significant differences in responses by demographics.

## Professional development question

### Question 18: How important are each of the following policy topics for your professional development?

Respondents were offered a list of policy matters and were asked to consider how important each topic is to their professional development. The purpose of this was to prompt respondents to think more about whether policy and influence can help their professional development and career progression. The results will enable the Policy & Evidence team to share the most relevant content via the RSC's professional development channels.

Respondents were asked to rate each topic on a scale from 'very important' to 'very unimportant' and could select 'don't know' if they weren't sure. The results are presented in Table 1.

Policy Topic	% for 'very important'	% for 'important'	% for 'neutral'
Working with parliamentarians (UK, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, MEPs)	17	23	29
Working with intergovernmental organisations (UN, EU)	18	28	27
How UK and devolved administration Governments and parliaments take decisions	13	30	30
How public policy (e.g. Government strategies, new regulations, Government investment schemes) is developed and how to influence it	20	37	23
How scientists can get involved in government Scientific Advisory Committees	27	33	21
How science and scientific research can inform Governments	32	36	15
Government/ policy careers	12	25	36

*Table 1: Percentage of respondents that selected 'very important', 'important', and 'neutral' for the importance of each policy area in their professional development. Responses: 1193.*

The following policy topics were the most important for respondents' professional development: **how science and scientific research can inform Governments, how scientists can get involved in government Scientific Advisory Committees, and how public policy is developed and how to influence it.** This question was more relevant to students, and those in the early or mid-stages of their careers. These groups felt more strongly about the importance of various policy topics in their professional development, as well as those working in academia and education.



## Awareness and engagement questions

**Question 12: How aware are you of RSC's Policy and Influence work?**

**Question 13: How often do you talk to colleagues and peers about RSC's policy work?**

**Question 14: What channels do you use to stay informed about RSC's policy work and positions?**

**Question 15: Which social media platforms do you use to stay up to date with RSC's policy work?**

**Question 16: On which channels would you like to see more information about RSC policy, evidence and parliamentary affairs work?**

The purpose of these questions was to gauge the level of awareness of our policy and influence work within the membership and the broader community. We are also interested in understanding if and how various demographics like to keep up to date, to help us develop better targeted strategies for communicating our policy work.

The results from question 12 showed that 66% of members are either **involved, fully aware, or somewhat aware** of our policy work. For the broader community (i.e. non-members), this figure was lower, 51%. There was some variation in the level of awareness across work sectors and career stages. Responses to question 13 show that 52% of respondents claimed to talk to peers or colleagues about RSC's policy work 'often' or 'sometimes'. Overall, there is room for improvement and results indicate an opportunity to engage students and those in the earlier stages of their careers. Visualisations for questions 12 and 13 can be found in the Annex.

Based on responses to questions 14 and 15 (see visualisations in Annex), the channels and social media platforms used by respondents to keep up with policy work varies across demographic groups. The most popular channels used by respondents are the Chemistry World magazine and the RSC website. Based on the 206 people who responded to question 15, most (73%) like to keep up with RSC's policy work on LinkedIn.

Question 16 (see Figure 6 below) highlights that our members would like to see more of our policy and evidence and parliamentary affairs work through the Chemistry World magazine, the RSC website, and in policy-specific newsletters or frequent e-updates. The broader community would most like to see more information on our website. There is scope to utilise different platforms to more effectively engage with a wider audience, such as social media livestreams and YouTube webinar series. In the free-text portion of question 16, many respondents stated that they would like to see more of the RSC's policy and campaign work on public channels, including national media and mainstream news. Many would like the RSC to be more proactive in showcasing positive stories on social media and the news. There was support for public campaigning initiatives, to raise awareness of important policy issues like chemicals regulation, research funding, and chemistry curricula. This approach raises visibility of chemistry research and highlights the vital role of chemists in society.

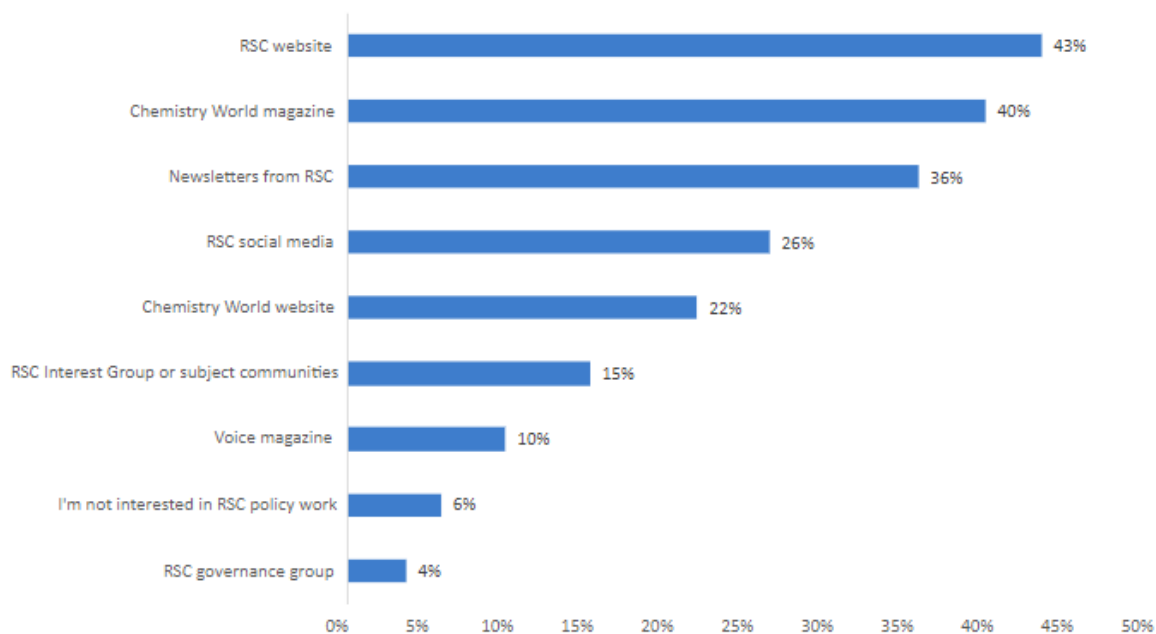


Figure 6: Responses to Question 16, where respondents were asked which channels they would like to see more information about RSC policy work through. Responses: 1193.

## Next steps for 2025 and beyond

Our policy and parliamentary affairs activities are part of the RSC Voice and Influence strategy, ensuring chemistry has a recognised and influential role in science and society. To ensure that we are making best use of RSC and our communities' resources and expertise, we conduct periodic reviews of our policy programme. Setting policy priorities ensures that our work makes the most impact, so we can influence decision-making in an agile and politically aware way. In line with our charitable purpose, we aim to act in the public interest and represent our member community, advocating for what chemistry needs from and can contribute to decision-making. Ultimately, our mission is to raise the visibility of how the chemical sciences can make the world a better place.

Our members' views are important to us and help guide the conversations we have with political decision-makers. This year's survey results have steered planning discussions within the Policy & Evidence and Parliamentary Affairs teams and helped to shape and refine our policy priority and advocacy areas for 2025 to 2029. This autumn, we put these policy areas forward to the relevant RSC Governance bodies for consideration and endorsement.

## Policy priorities for 2025-29

We have developed a policy programme that aligns with the [Royal Society of Chemistry's strategy](#) for 2025 and beyond. Key policy topics fit our Voice and Influence strategy, particularly our work to influence decision makers, responding to the political environment while drawing on expertise, evidence and insights from across our community. The survey showed that members considered all the topics in the 2022-24 policy programme important, so they will continue into the 2025-29 programme, alongside a few new topics and themes many respondents considered important for the future. The policy programme topics are:

1. *A strategic approach to the management of chemicals and resources for a robust and sustainable economy.*
  - a. Sustainable chemicals policy
  - b. Chemistry and circular economy
  - c. Tackling pollution
2. *A world-class chemistry education for all.*
  - a. A relevant and adequately resourced curriculum
  - b. Empowered expert school and college workforce
  - c. Accessible routes and equitable pathways
3. *An ambitious, inclusive, and stable R&D and skills policy environment for UK science and innovation to drive economic growth.*
  - a. Sustainable research and innovation funding
  - b. An inclusive science culture
  - c. Chemistry workforce and skills
  - d. Post-secondary chemistry education, including financial sustainability in higher education

We will also be focusing on a few cross-cutting themes, which intersect several of our policy topics:

- a. *Chemistry and net zero*
- b. *Supply chains for chemistry sectors including alternatives to fossil hydrocarbons*
- c. *Chemistry and economic growth*
- d. *Chemistry and industrial strategy*
- e. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

The policy and parliamentary affairs environment is dynamic by nature. We will maintain an agile approach so that we can respond effectively to new developments over the coming years. This could mean our policy team is not actively working on all the policy topics and themes in any given year and aspects of the programme might have to be phased.

## Communications & awareness

We endeavour to keep the RSC community informed and engaged in our policy and parliamentary affairs work. Survey results will inform the way we do this going forward. Respondents told us that they would like to hear about policy and parliamentary affairs works through the following channels: RSC website, Chemistry World magazine, RSC newsletters and RSC social media. We will continue to use the RSC website and ensure we use regular member newsletters to update on policy work, monitoring engagement where possible. Chemistry World remains an editorially independent publication. The RSC policy team will liaise with Chemistry World's editorial team regarding key policy objectives to inform Chemistry World's coverage and editorial priorities. We will continue to make use of the 'Voice of the RSC' branded content as a channel to highlight RSC policy activity and messaging.

Survey respondents also told us that they would like to see more RSC policy work feature in mainstream media. We will continue to build on the momentum and success of public campaigns like our [ice lollies in science lessons](#) piece, which calls for improved STEM accessibility and engagement. This forms part of our work to inform the Government's curriculum and assessment review in England. Another example is our ongoing [PFAS campaign](#), which in the past year has seen hundreds of pieces of broadcast, print and online coverage reach an audience of millions, helping to influence policymakers and regulators to the extent that drinking water standards have been strengthened in line with our recommendations.

If you would like to know more, see our public engagement and outreach [work](#). If you are a member and would like to get involved in engaging different audiences with chemistry, you can browse our public engagement and outreach opportunities [here](#).

The feedback on priorities for professional development linked to policy is helpful and will inform relevant member programmes and careers resources. If you are a member and would like to know more about how scientists can get involved in Scientific Advisory Committees, there is a 2023 [webinar](#) and a '[how to' article](#) which contains links to appointments you can apply for.

## Inclusion and Diversity

We believe that chemistry should be for everyone. Through the [Inclusion & Diversity strategy to 2025](#), our goal is to increase the diversity of people choosing the chemical sciences and fulfilling their potential for a truly inclusive community. In recent years, the RSC Inclusion & Diversity work has grown in prominence with increased focus on data and evidence to gain an in depth understanding of the needs of underrepresented groups.

The RSC is dedicated to fostering inclusion, diversity, accessibility and a positive culture in the chemical sciences. We recognise the importance of valuing all members of our community; believing that for the chemical sciences to prosper, we must attract, develop and retain a diverse range of talented people. As a professional and membership body, and a leading voice for the chemistry community, we have a responsibility to promote inclusivity and accessibility to improve inclusive access and progression within the chemical sciences.

As part of our Inclusion & Diversity work, we produce [evidence-based reports](#), host impactful events and activities, and develop [practical resources like toolkits](#) to drive change

Additionally, we take pride in offering [prizes](#) and [funding opportunities](#) that provide financial support for innovative products, activities and research projects. Empowering the chemical sciences community to deliver community driven projects that advance inclusion and accessibility in the chemical sciences, underscoring our commitment to creating a more equitable and thriving scientific community. Meanwhile our [grants for carers](#) and [accessibility grants](#) reduces accessibility challenges when [attending professional events](#).

## How to get involved

More information on our policy work can be found on [our corporate website](#), while future updates will be published in Voice magazine and relevant member communications. If you would like to get involved, we would like to hear from you:

- Join one of our policy communities: our [Environmental Policy Group](#) helps inform our work on environmental policy and chemicals regulation and our [Research and Innovation Policy Group](#) helps inform our work on R&D, from funding and commercialisation to international collaboration mobility and research culture.

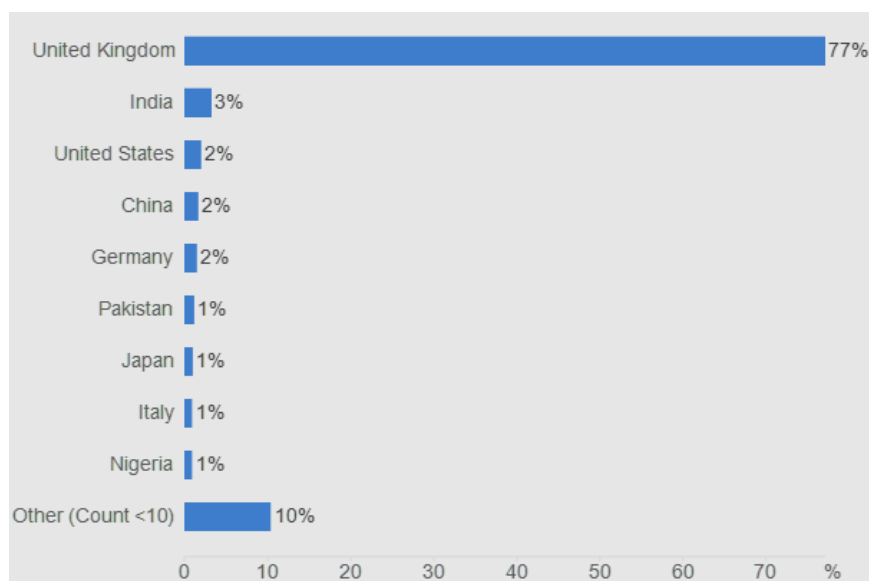
- You might also like to join our [Education Community Council](#), which promotes the study and dissemination of knowledge of chemical education at all levels. This includes informing our education policy work.
- Share your story: we would welcome case studies on the themes discussed in this summary, please send to [policy@rsc.org](mailto:policy@rsc.org).

Your participation in any of the above is a chance to drive positive change and ensure that the chemical sciences continue to thrive and benefit society, improving our health, environment, and daily lives.

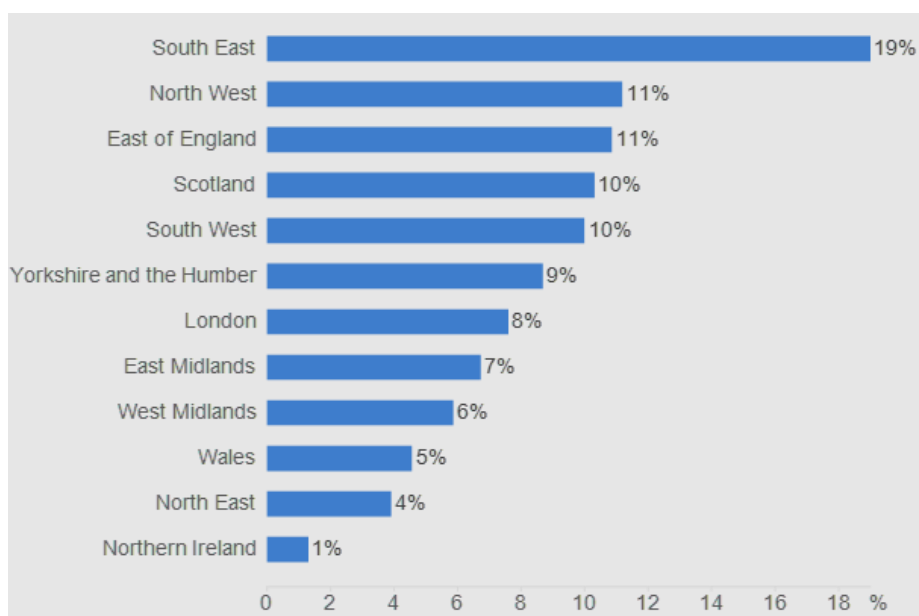
Please get in touch via [policy@rsc.org](mailto:policy@rsc.org).

November 2024

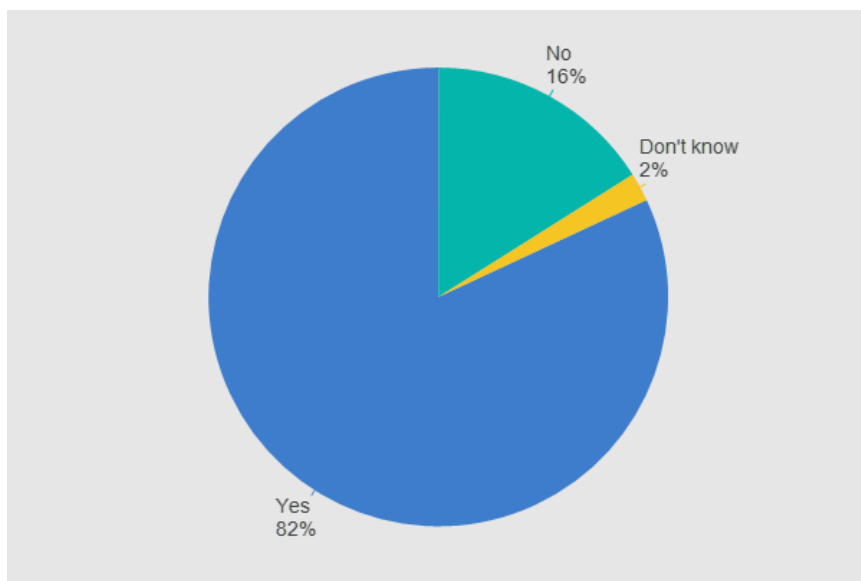
## Annex: Additional graphs and data



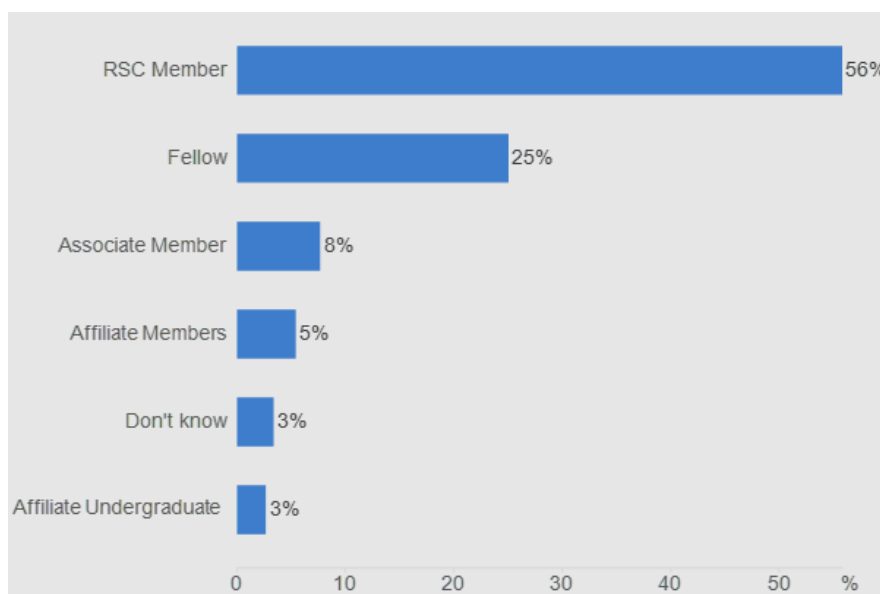
Annex Figure A. Responses to Q1: 'Which country / region are you from?' Responses: 1193.



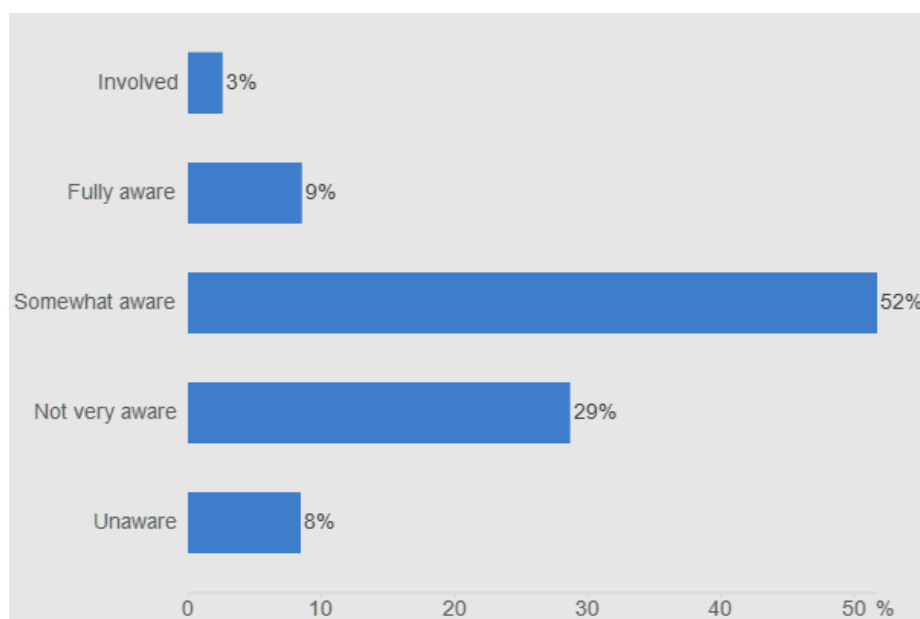
Annex Figure B. Responses to Q2: 'Where in the UK are you from?' Responses: 921.



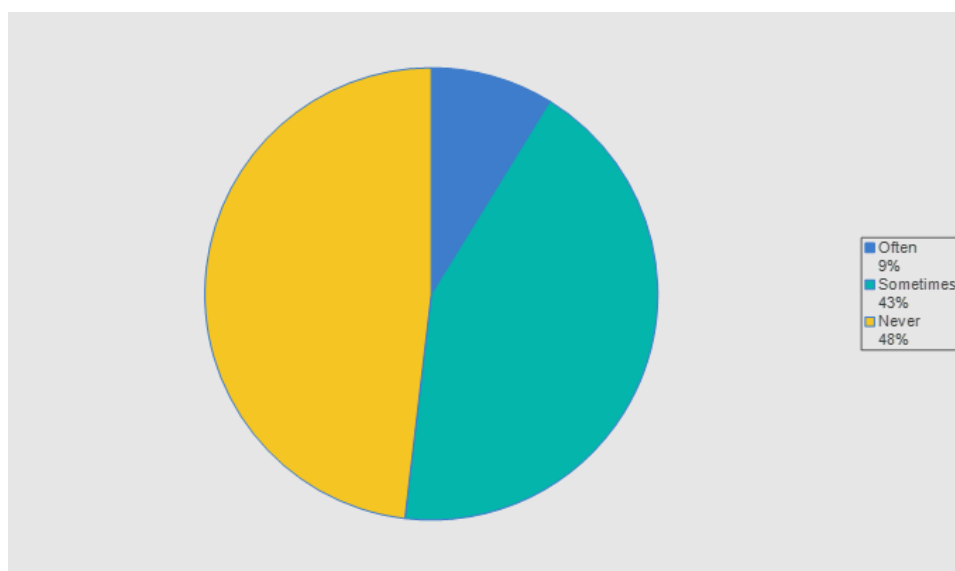
Annex Figure C. Responses to Q6: 'Are you a member of the Royal Society of Chemistry?' Responses: 1193.



Annex Figure D. Responses to Q7: 'To which member category do you belong?' Responses: 978.

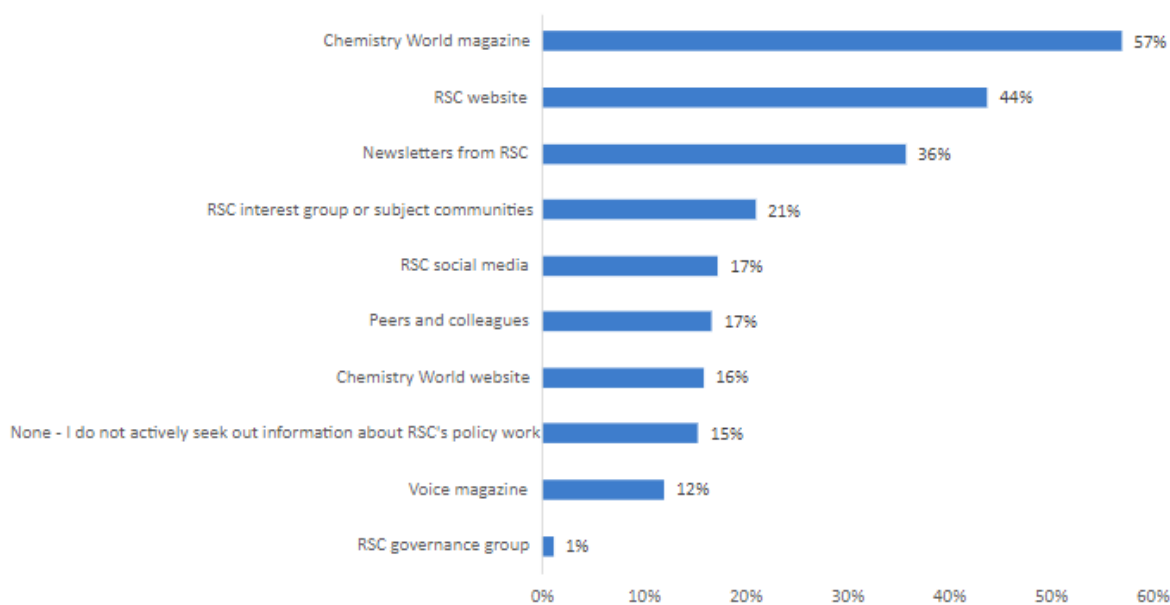


Annex Figure E. Responses to Q12: 'How aware are you of RSC's Policy and Influence work?' Responses: 1193.

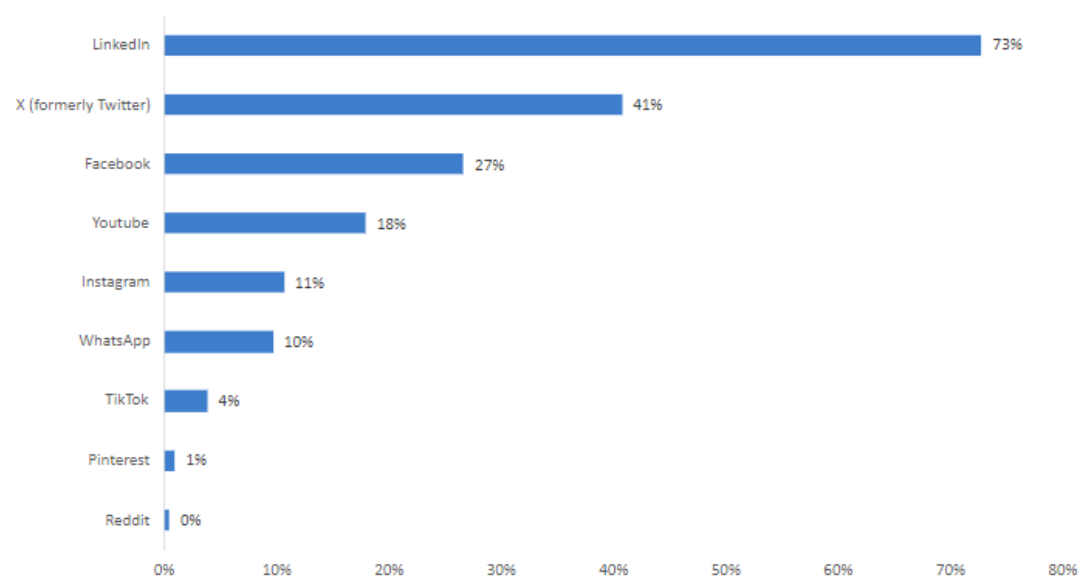


Annex Figure F. Responses to Q13: 'How often do you talk to colleagues and peers about RSC's policy work? Please select one.' Responses: 1193.





*Annex Figure G. Responses to Q14: 'What channels do you use to stay informed about RSC's policy work and positions. Please select all that apply.' Responses: 1193.*



*Annex Figure H. Responses to Q15: 'Which social media platforms do you use to stay up to date with RSC's policy work? Please select all that apply.' Responses: 206.*