

## Public Attitudes to R&D and International Talent

This briefing summarises attitudes to immigration, international students and researchers, and their impact on UK R&D. It is based on evidence from a nationally representative survey of 4,100 UK adults in June 2024 and two focus groups in December 2024.

### Concern about levels of immigration has risen in recent years

- The proportion of people saying that levels of immigration is one of the most important issues facing the UK rose from 17% in May 2022 to 34% in September 2024.

### International students and researchers are seen as beneficial to the UK

- 54% of those who agreed the UK's universities are some of the best in the world said this was because many international students want to study in them.
- Around 4 in 10 think UK universities shouldn't change how many international students they accept.
- When framed around the benefits they bring the UK and UK universities, the majority view international students coming to the UK positively.
- People think employing international researchers can diversify ideas and culture, improve the UK economy, increase international collaboration and strengthen the quality of UK R&D.



Legal immigrants coming across to work is fair enough, there's positions for them, but illegal immigration is just a drain on our system.

*Female, 52, Shop Assistant, Kingston upon Hull East*

### Immigration reforms that would restrict UK R&D are viewed negatively

- People were more likely to see hypothetical immigration reforms that led to negative impacts for R&D and university recruitment as a failure than a success.
- Around half of people felt that immigration reforms that would mean more international students could stay to work in the UK for a limited time after finishing their studies would be a success, compared with just 12% who thought it would be a failure.
- A majority (52%) would prefer universities in the UK to recruit the best global talent, even if it means more immigration to the UK.