

## **New UKERC Research Defines Values Which Determine Public Acceptance of Energy System Change**

- Public wants to see transition to an efficient, clean, fair and safe energy system
- 82% are worried about the UK becoming too dependent on energy from other countries
- 74% of participants are very or fairly concerned about climate change
- 81% of people would like to reduce their energy use
- But trust in both energy companies and Government is low - which could hamper energy system development

*The values and factors that influence people when deciding whether to accept or reject changes to the energy system are revealed for the very first time in a new study.*

The findings of the study, funded by the **UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC)** and carried out by a team from the Universities of Cardiff and Nottingham, reveal that people in Britain are fully supportive of the idea of energy system change.

Professor Nick Pidgeon, who led the research team, said: "Our participants saw the bigger picture of energy system transformation, and they were overwhelmingly committed to moving away from fossil fuels towards renewable forms of energy production, and to lowering energy demand".

The research highlights key factors that influence public assessment of proposed changes. From examining these factors, the research shows that the public favours changes that are: energy efficient rather than wasteful; protect the environment and nature; are reliable, accessible and safe; allow consumers a certain amount of autonomy and power; are socially just and fair; improve on what has gone before; score well in terms of quality and performance; and, fit with a long-term, sustainable trajectory, rather than being just a short-term fix.

The report proposes that energy policies not taking account of these factors in combination are unlikely to secure public support.

The study synthesis report "Transforming the UK energy system – public values, attitudes and acceptability" brings together the findings from two in-depth phases of research carried out over thirty months; a series of six in-depth deliberative workshops with members of the public held across England, Scotland and Wales; and a nationally representative survey of 2,441 members of the public.

Some of the major findings include:

- In the national survey 74% of participants were very or fairly concerned about climate change, while 82% were worried about the UK becoming too dependent upon energy from other countries.
- 79% wanted to see a reduction in the use of fossil fuels over the next few decades.
- 81% expressed a desire to reduce their energy use; and support for solar (85%) and wind energy (75%) remained very strong.
- The study examined high technology electricity supply options. People were unfamiliar with carbon capture and storage (42% of people had never heard of it) and when given further information many expressed concern, viewing it as a "non transition" – a continuation of unsustainable practices associated with fossil fuels.
- The public is undecided on the role of nuclear power in the future energy mix. However, over half (54%) still said they would oppose the building of a new nuclear power station in their area.
- Awareness of new low-carbon technologies for the home, such as "heat pumps", was low. The percentage of people willing to use electric heating rose from 42% to 61% if it was posed as matching the performance of current systems, and to 85% if it was also presented as cheaper. A majority (53%) were willing to use electric vehicles, rising to 75% if they performed as well as conventional models.
- There were mixed views about smart metering and so-called "demand side management" – where use of new information technology helps to promote energy efficiency and reduction measures. Here, notions about the home being a private space, free from outside control, were important. People were also more open to the idea of appliances being turned off automatically after a period on standby, for example, than they were about having their showering times curtailed or their fridges and freezers controlled remotely.
- Whilst most people were willing to share their electricity data, around a fifth (22%) were not. Interestingly, people were more willing to share data about their electricity use with energy companies than with the Government, who they perceived to be motivated by short-term motives related to the electoral cycle rather than a genuine desire for change.
- Neither energy companies nor Government were trusted, and the research indicates that this issue must be addressed for successful energy system change.

Professor Pidgeon comments: "Our research has shown clearly that people are more likely to accept changes that show signs of commitment to their underlying values, such as energy system components that are clean, efficient, fair and safe. The public is also keen for policy makers to clarify how current changes to the energy system fit with longer-term plans, and to develop an intelligible and coherent strategy for this".

**- Ends -**

#### **Notes to Editors**

- The synthesis report "Transforming the UK Energy System – Public Values, Attitudes and Acceptability" ([www.ukerc.ac.uk/support/tikidownload\\_file.php?fileId=3229](http://www.ukerc.ac.uk/support/tikidownload_file.php?fileId=3229) ) was launched at the Royal Society on 16 July 2013 and was authored by Dr Karen Parkhill, Dr Christina Demski, Dr



Catherine Butler, and Prof Nick Pidgeon at Cardiff University, and Dr Alexa Spence at the University of Nottingham.

- The report's key findings are based upon a synthesis of data obtained from six in-depth deliberative workshops held with publics in England, Scotland and Wales, and a nationally representative survey carried out by Ipsos MORI (Great Britain, n=2,441).
- The findings of each these two research phases (workshops and national survey respectively) have been analysed and published in separate reports and are also available from the UKERC website. Today's synthesis report presents key messages that emerge as a result of combining both datasets.
- The research was funded primarily by a grant from the UK Energy Research Centre, with additional funding from the Leverhulme Trust and the Welsh Government. The full project partners are the Schools of Psychology, Engineering and Architecture, all at Cardiff University, together with Horizon Digital Economy Research at the University of Nottingham.
- For further information, or to interview the authors, please contact Lindsay Wright, UKERC Head of Communications - tel: 0207 594 2669/ email:lindsay.wright@ukerc.ac.uk or Dr Matthew Aylott, Communications Officer – tel: 0207 594 1573/email: matthew.aylott@ukerc.ac.uk

#### **About the UK Energy Research Centre**

- The UK Energy Research Centre, which is funded by Research Councils UK, carries out world-class research into sustainable future energy systems. It is the hub of UK energy research and the gateway between the UK and the international energy research communities. Our interdisciplinary, whole-systems research informs UK policy development and research strategy.

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