



# Why should they care? Engaging political audiences with frontier science

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# Why I care

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- Background primarily in politics and public sector
  - Bismarck: politics is not a science..... It is an art
- Chief Political Correspondent
  - Paid to read the political mood and get it right
- Senior Policy Adviser
  - My mortgage was on the line in elections
- Worked in strategic science engagement >9 years
  - I chose this job because it's important

# Key messages

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- You are respected but not understood
  - It's your responsibility to improve the understanding
- You are “science” – don't make artificial distinctions
  - United you stand, divided you get ignored
- Be clear what you want – strategic objective
  - You can't have everything
- Understand what your audience thinks of you
  - Be clear what you want them to think of you

# The beginning, today, and tomorrow

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Helios, Athenian red-figure krater  
C5th B.C., British Museum



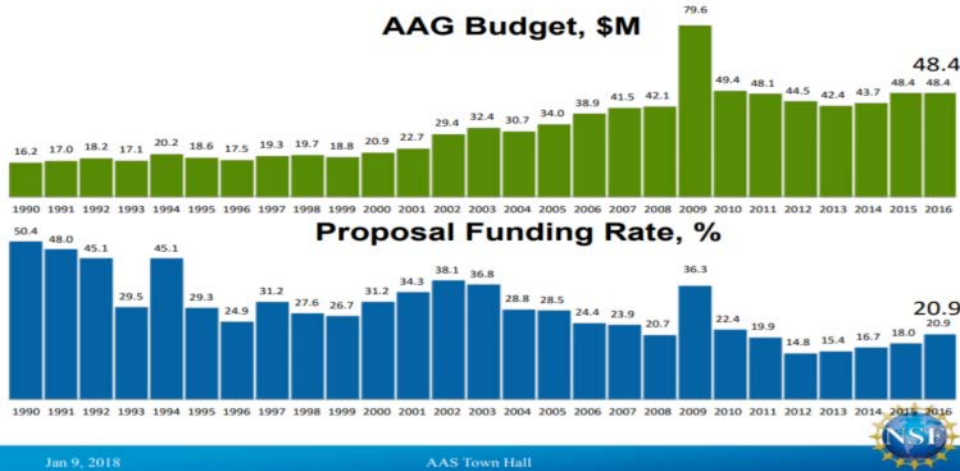
Very Large Array, ESO



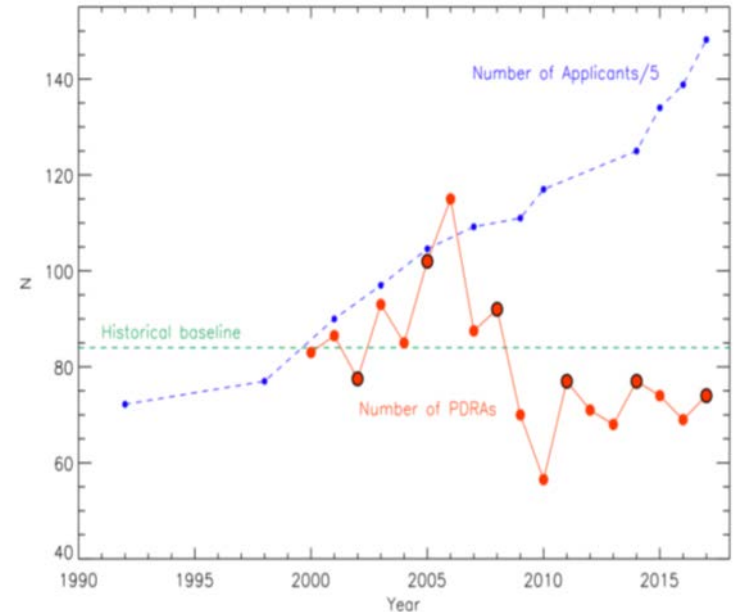
SKA Low Frequency  
Aperture Array, artist  
impression, SKA

# Funding is good, but could be better

## AAG Funding History, 1990-2016



Richard Green, NSF Division Director, MPS/AST



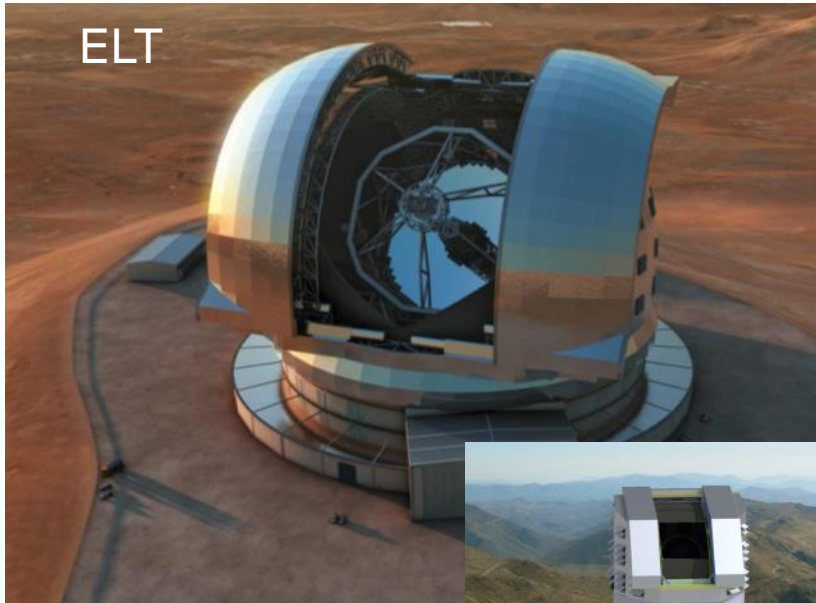
PDRA support provided by STFC/PPARC astronomy grants compared to growth of the UK's academic research community



# The glass is more than half-full

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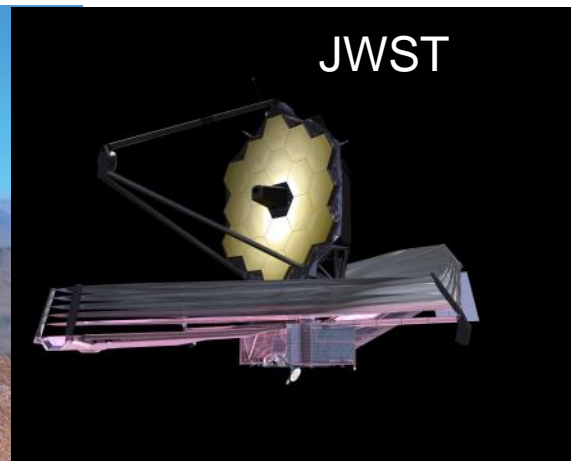
ELT



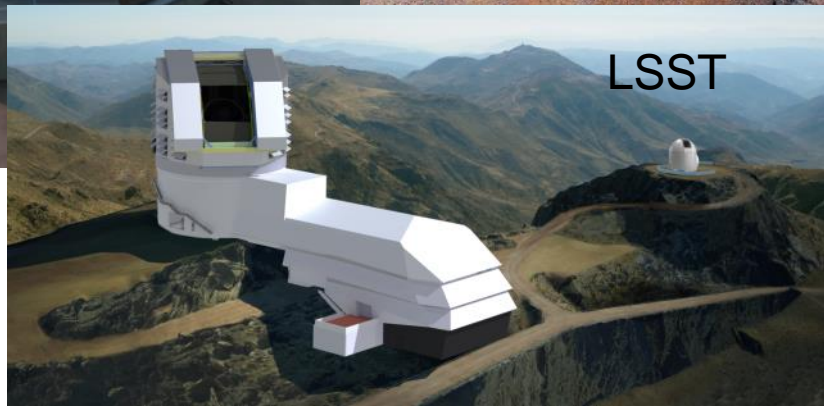
GMT



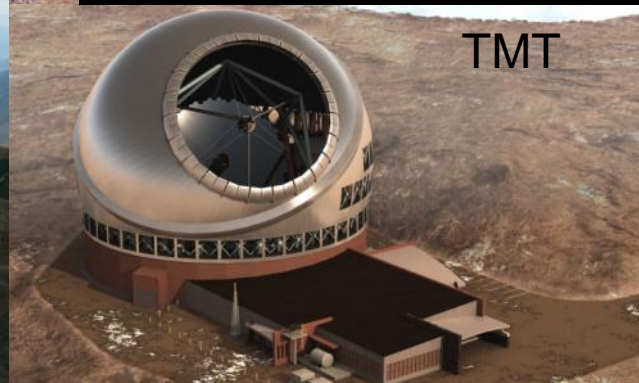
JWST



LSST



TMT



# Frontier science is not front of mind



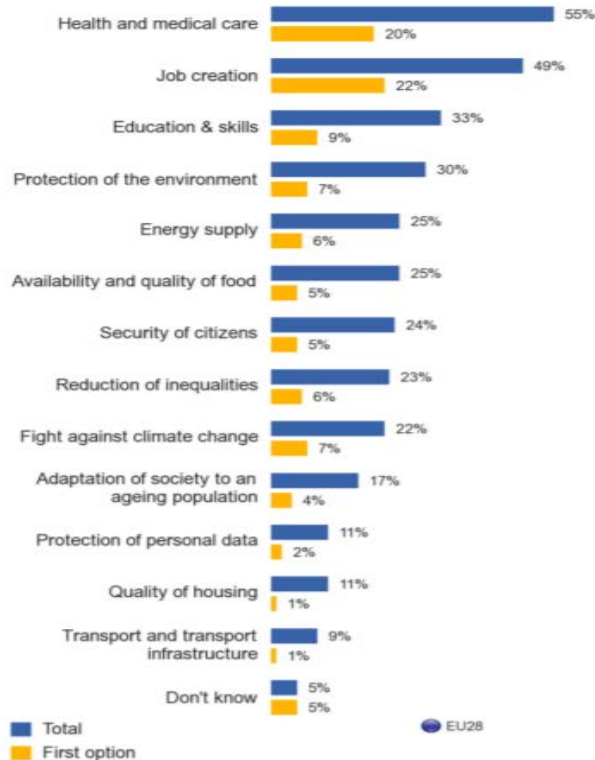
Special Eurobarometer 419

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE,  
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

REPORT

Published October 2014

QB3. Over the next 15 years, what should be the priorities when it comes to science and technological innovation?



Astronomy & other frontier sciences are not mentioned.

But frontier science skills, technologies and processes contribute to many of these priorities

# UK survey also positive but.....

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- Science makes direct contribution to economic growth – 76%
- Science funding should be cut to spend elsewhere – 65% disagree
- Science/tech too specialised for people to understand – 55%
- Scientists seen as interesting, open minded, creative, honest, ethical, but **secretive**

Public Understanding of Science Survey. IPSOS/Mori-BEIS, 2014



# And in politics?

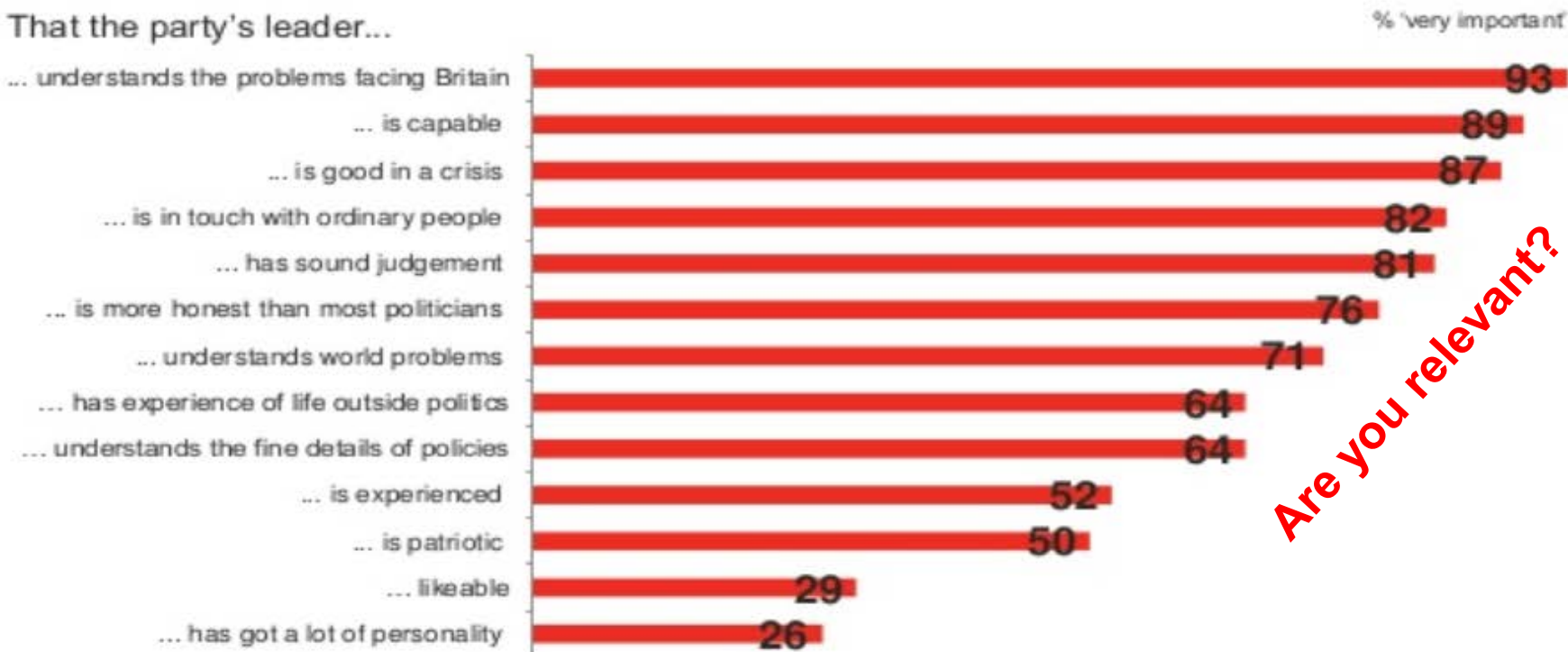
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- Politicians read polls, they respond to (and lead) the public mood
  - They know science is popular
  - They like it too!
- What matters to them?
  - Their constituents
  - Their party and colleagues
  - Their country
- You need become more relevant to their concerns

# What people SAY makes a good Prime Minister

For each of the following, how important, if at all, would you say the things I am going to read out are to make a good Prime Minister?

That the party's leader...



# Make yourself relevant: UK example

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- UK has world-class scientists but needs to “turn their ideas into the products and services on which the industries of the future will be built”:  
Theresa May
- “Four areas where Britain can lead the global technological revolution”  
– AI & big data; clean growth; the future of mobility; and ageing society.  
Greg Clark
- UK Government accepts science has a role to play
  - You make yourself relevant by contributing to solutions

# Your contribution is broad

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- The actual science and technology
  - Enabling better understanding of our world
- Direct and indirect economic activity
  - Local spend, spin-out companies, multiplier effect, 3rd party adoption
- Skills
  - Direct and indirect skills development, inspiration and education
- Policy
  - Contribution to national debate (eg environment, health)

# .....and even broader

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The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by sceptics or cynics, whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need (people) who can dream of things that never were, and ask why not.

John F Kennedy, June 1963

**SCIENCE DELIVERS THE THINGS  
THAT NEVER WERE**

# Key messages

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- You are respected but not understood
  - You are problem solvers
- You are “science” – don’t make artificial distinctions
  - You are collaborative problem solvers
- Be clear what you want – strategic objective
  - You want to be recognised as problem solvers
- Understand what your audience thinks of you
  - You want to be thought of the solution not the problem



# A final thought