ROYAL ECONOMIC SOCIETY

RES Professional Culture in UK Economics Academia

Summary of Results

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BACKGROUND

The Royal Economic Society is committed to fostering a more inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment within the UK economics profession. Recent surveys have shown some concerning findings regarding the culture in economics. A 2024 European Economic Association survey suggested that UK-based economists had the highest perceived experience of discrimination across Europe. The RES's own Standards of Conduct Survey conducted in 2023 among RES members revealed similarly troubling results.

As part of the ongoing commitments in this area, RES launched a Culture Survey with the aim to better understand the experiences of those working in UK academic economics, and to build a robust evidence base that can inform meaningful and effective interventions.

THE SURVEY

The Culture Survey was open between November 2024 and February 2025 and was widely disseminated across the UK academic economics community. A total of 415 individuals engaged with the survey; a strong level of participation compared with similar questionnaires. Of these, **284 respondents** completed the survey in full, and their responses form the basis of the analysis presented in this report.

The survey focused on three core areas:

- Perceptions of the culture within UK academic economics
- Perceptions of the discipline of economics more broadly
- Experiences with discrimination and unfair treatment

In addition, respondents were asked to provide demographic information, including gender, ethnicity, disability status, institutional affiliation, and career stage. The survey also included questions to capture aspects of socio-economic background, such as parental education and household financial security during upbringing. To ensure the survey remained manageable in length, some demographic dimensions, such as sexual orientation and caring responsibilities, were not included. These are recognised as important, and future work will aim to address these gaps.

RESULTS

1. Perceptions of the Culture within UK Academic Economics

Survey responses reveal a mixed picture of the culture within UK academic economics. While many respondents reported broadly positive experiences, a significant minority—around one in five—expressed strong concerns, including that the profession is not supportive and not inclusive. Strikingly fewer than half of all respondents reported being satisfied with the current culture. See results summarised in figures 1 to 3 below.

UK Academic Community

Question: To what extent you consider the UK academic community of economists to be...

Figure 1: Positive characteristics

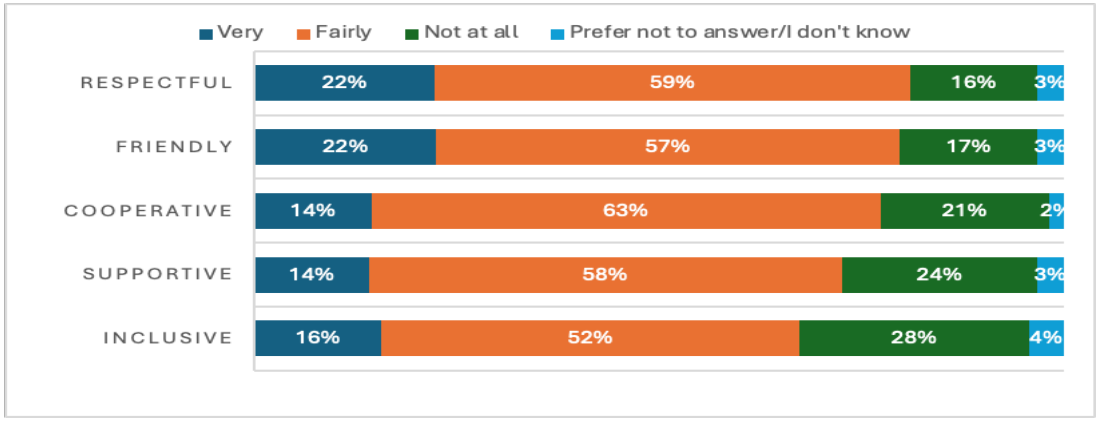
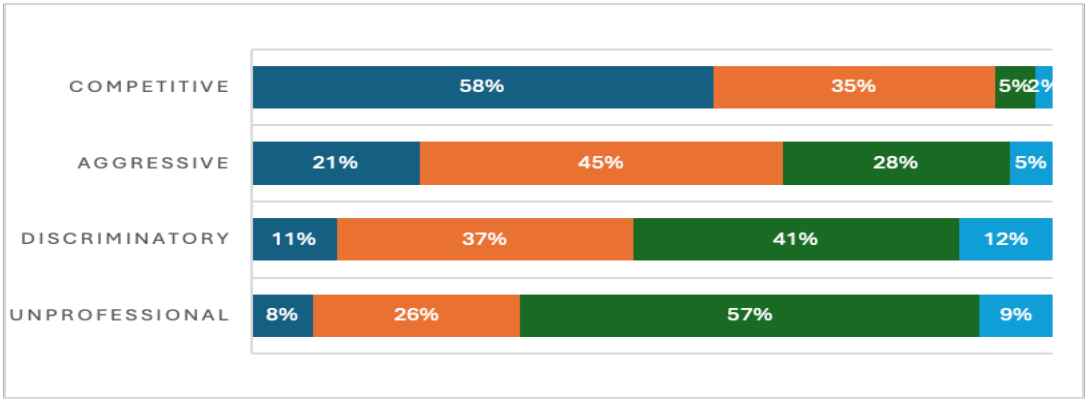


Figure 2: Competitive + negative characteristics



Results by groups

There were clear and consistent differences across demographic groups and institutional identities:

- Those with professorial titles were more likely to report positive perceptions and less likely to describe the profession as discriminatory or unprofessional.

- Gender differences were modest in more areas, with a notable exception in perceptions of discrimination: 54% of women regard the community as discriminatory compared with 38% for men.
- Ethnic differences in perception were more pronounced: 52% of all other ethnic group respondents found the discipline inclusive as against 71% for White respondents. In terms of perceived discrimination, the respective figures were 56% and 46%.
- Respondents with disabilities were liable to report less positive and more negative experiences than non-disabled counterparts. This is strongly suggestive but the small number of disabled respondents (12 individuals) counsels caution. Further work to explore this area would seem to be indicated.
- Those identifying as from low-income backgrounds also reported much lower inclusivity than the respondents as a whole. Again, the low sample size (7 respondents) qualifies what conclusions may be drawn but they highlight the need for more research into class and socio-economic disadvantage in academic economics.

The survey explored whether there are perceived changes over the past five years, across both positive and negative dimensions.

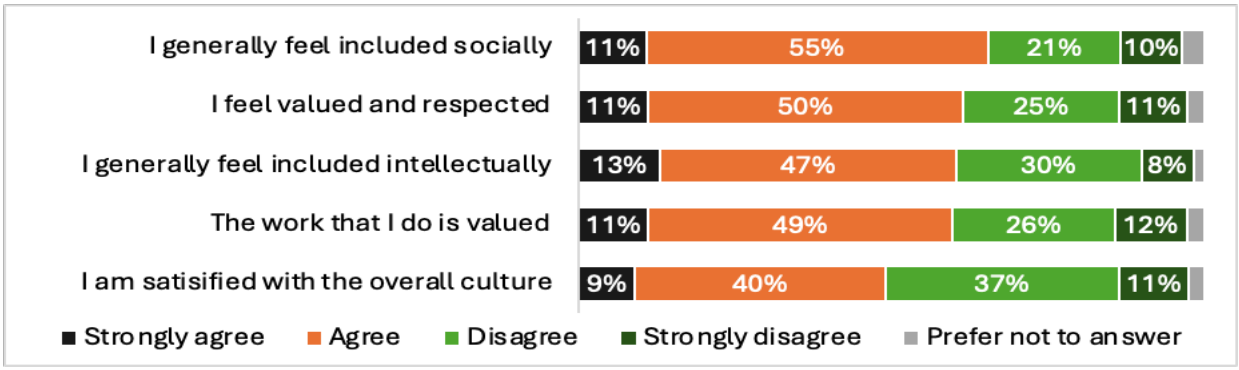
- On the positive dimensions, most respondents felt the culture had remained about the same. A notable exception was inclusivity, where 34% of respondents report it had improved compared with only 16% who believe it had deteriorated.
- Views on change were often evenly split between those who saw improvement and those who perceived deterioration.
- On the negative dimensions, more than 50% of respondents reported no change. However, more respondents perceived a deterioration than an improvement. For example, 24% felt the discipline had become more aggressive, compared to 14% who thought it had improved.

Overall, while there are encouraging signs—particularly regarding perceived improvements in inclusivity—the general pattern is one of stasis. Where progress exists, it appears to be incremental and slow-moving.

Survey participants were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about their sense of inclusion, respect, and recognition in the discipline. Overall results are summarised in Figures 3 and 4 below. Also in this case, there are notable differences by groups that reflect similar patterns as above and discussed in detail in the upcoming report.

Figure 3: How Economists Experience the Discipline

Question: How strongly you agree with each of the following statements related to the field of economics:

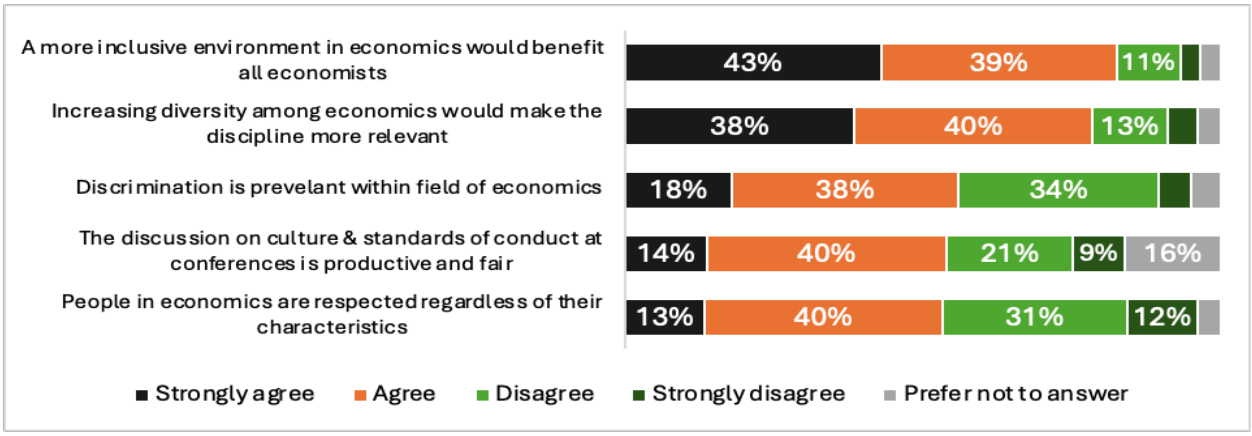


2. Perceptions of the discipline

This section of the survey related to how academic economists in the UK perceive the discipline in terms of inclusion, fairness and professional integrity. Results reported in the figure below.

Figure 4: How Economists Perceive the Discipline

Question: How strongly you agree with each of the following statements related to the field of economics:



The results by groups echoed patterns already observed: professors and older respondents are less likely to perceive discrimination, respondents from non-Russell Group institutions, women (in particular at lecturer level), respondents from all other ethnic groups and those with disabilities are more likely to agree that discrimination is prevalent, and less likely to agree that people are respected in economics regardless their characteristics.

In terms of fairness, most respondents indicated that they had been treated fairly all or most of the time. However, a substantial minority reported experiencing unfair treatment either frequently or consistently. The highest levels of perceived unfairness were reported in relation to compensation (36% report not to be treated fairly most of the time), promotion decisions (32%) and publishing (31%).

Respondents were also asked about their interactions with colleagues and whether they felt their work was valued. While most reported positive interactions and felt valued by peers and junior colleagues, these percentages declined significantly when considering senior colleagues. Further analysis of these results is provided in the final report.

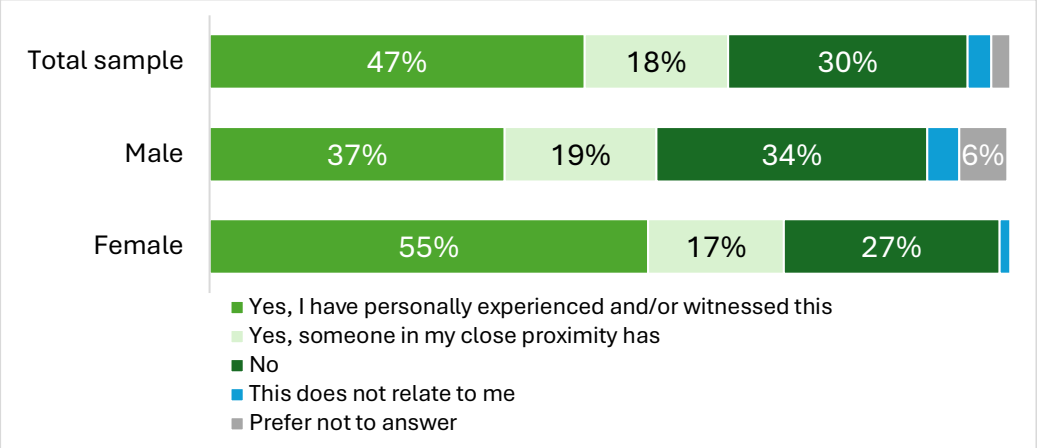
Finally, the survey addressed views on research integrity in UK economics. While 27% believed research integrity to be high, 46% said that although integrity was generally good, they had witnessed behaviours that fell short of expected standards. A further 11% described research integrity as weak, pointing to an area requiring further scrutiny and support.

3. Experiences with discrimination

This section of the survey adopted a broad definition of discrimination, encompassing "discrimination or unfair treatment such as harassment, bullying or disrespect". The responses were among the most troubling in the survey, highlighting striking gender differences and reinforcing the findings of the RES Standards of Conduct Survey conducted in 2023. Figure 5 below summarises some of the main findings, a detailed analysis of these responses is provided in the final report.

Figure 5: Experiences of Discrimination or Unfair Treatment

Question: In the past 5 years, have you experienced or witnessed any form of discrimination or unfair treatment (such as harassment, bullying or disrespect) in the field of economics in the UK?



The respondent's own institution was most commonly cited as the setting for these incidents, with more senior colleagues most often identified as the perpetrators. A total of 119 respondents described their experiences in detail. The word cloud below was generated from these responses, highlighting the most frequently mentioned terms.

Acts of Discrimination – Word Cloud

Question: In which form did the act of discrimination or unfair treatment, that you experienced or witnessed, take place?

Note: Analysis of 60 key terms from 336 total occurrences in discrimination reports. Most frequent: "bullying" (20), "senior" (17), "colleague" (15). Word Cloud created using Claude.ai

Notably, nearly two-thirds of these incidents were not reported through formal channels. The main reasons given were:

- A belief that no action would be taken against the perpetrator (45%),
- Fear of personal or professional repercussions (38%),
- Lack of trust in reporting mechanisms (35%).

More than half of those who had witnessed or experienced discrimination reported taking specific actions to avoid potential future incidents. These included avoiding seminar or conference participation, choosing not to apply for promotion, withdrawing from social events, or steering away from particular research areas. That individuals feel the need to take such measures of self-protection is itself deeply concerning and warrants urgent attention.

NEXT STEPS AND THE ROLE OF THE RES

The survey suggests much within the current culture of UK academic economics is viewed positively by respondents. Many describe their experience as generally supportive, respectful and inclusive.

But a number of more negative features are also revealed:

- There are significant differences in perception and experiences of different groups within the overall community. Women, those from all other ethnic groups, those with disabilities and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds generally report less positive and more negative perceptions of the current climate.
- More than half of all respondents believe that discrimination is prevalent in the profession.
- Negative experiences are particularly concentrated in hierarchical relationships, interactions with more senior colleagues are the more likely to be characterised as unpleasant or unfair than with other counterparts.

The case for complacency in the face of these findings is therefore untenable. This conclusion seems widely shared. Only 26% of respondents felt the RES was doing enough to raise awareness of diversity. 61% felt current efforts were either partially or whole insufficient.

The RES will therefore continue and where necessary increase its drive towards a more diverse and inclusive profession, and one characterised by improved overall standards of behaviour. More specifically, the following actions will be put in hand:

- A further survey will be conducted, in two to three years' time, to allow an assessment to be made of progress and also to detect new and emerging issues that should be addressed.
- To add to the insights provided by the current survey, a programme of focus groups will be put in hand. These should enable more insights than the survey itself provided - for example relating to incidence of perceived discrimination across dimensions such as career stage, ethnicity, disability and so on. These focus groups should also allow development of the evidence base about the impact, for example, of socio-economic background and of caring responsibilities
- While understanding the nature and cause of the issues with which this report is concerned is an essential basis, the focus groups will also be used to help formulate more effective remedial actions to combat these problems.

More widely, the RES cannot achieve the goals of improved diversity, inclusion and improved standards of conduct on its own. Much of what is needed must come from universities and other employers. The RES's Diversity, Inclusion and Professional Conduct leads will therefore work closely with the Conference of Heads of Departments of Economics (CHUDE) to produce toolkits – to assemble advice and other material that can be shared, and which can be utilised in specific employment settings.