

What should happen to your brain after you die?

Edinburgh International Science Festival
Royal College of Surgeons
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Voting Summary

- While there was strong support (93%) for the use of human brains in research, only 52% of participants indicated that they would want their own brain used for research after death.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of participants supported the idea of a publicity campaign to encourage donations from people with no neurological disease, and 88% of participants thought that potential donors should sign up to join a donor register prior to death.
- The overwhelming majority (92%) thought that research on human brain tissue should be subject to legal regulation, while 69% thought that Scottish Brain Banks should be responsible to a single authority, similar to the Human Tissue Authority in England.
- There were mixed reactions to questions about the sharing of results with relatives or next of kin; whether personal records relating to donated brains should be irreversibly anonymised; and whether researchers should be permitted to access other data (eg. health, education and criminal records) about the individuals whose brains they are studying.
- Seventy-four percent (74%) of participants thought that informed consent forms should specify that the donated brain may be used for research that leads to commercial profit.
- The majority of participants (76%) considered brain donation for research to be different from donation of other organs for transplantation. Fifty-four percent (54%) of participants thought that the post mortem donation of brain tissue for research should be arranged at the same time as organ donation for transplantation; however, the majority of participants (65%) did not think it should be assumed that organ donation carriers would want to donate their brains.
- Most participants (66%) thought that studying the brain could tell us things about what it means to be human that we can't learn from studying other organs.