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Scientific integrity, personal responsibility, public trust and the role of professional societies

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There is a perception that trust in science and scientists has been eroded by, amongst other forces, populist ideologies that have rapidly gained traction in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere in recent years. Apparent scepticism about climate change, efficacy of vaccines and an ideology that promotes self-interest over the greater good has the potential to erode trust in scientists who are often painted as disconnected, intellectual elite. As a highly educated, UK government minister and Justice Secretary recently and famously stated “people in this country have had enough of experts”. If that is true, then who are the public listening to and who do they trust? Have we really entered a post-truth world? Is this picture a true reflection of public attitudes? Where do these narratives come from and what can scientists do to counteract a potentially destructive portrayal of our community? In this presentation, I aim to tackle these questions alongside the role that organisations such as EGU can play and the importance of transparency, honesty and openness to dispel the myths promulgated by some of the negative forces acting in society today. I will do this with examples drawn from my own experiences as an academic and former president of EGU. I will reflect on some of the challenges we faced, how we responded to them and the lessons learned.