

Pathways outside academia

This tip-sheet aims to answer the question, 'What do postdocs do if they choose not to stay on in academic research?' The data are based on a combination of national surveys, which have been cross-checked against unpublished information specific to STEM postdocs.

1. Career destinations

Leaving academia

- According to national data from Research Councils UK, nine years after completing their PhDs, **approximately 50% of researchers had left the higher education sector**.
- 76% left because they wanted better long-term employment prospects, with 69% saying specifically that they no longer wanted to work on fixed-term contracts.

Destinations outside academia

- Data published by the Careers Research and Advisory Service show the destinations of research staff who had done at least one postdoc before leaving academia. Almost three-quarters were concentrated in five clusters:

%	Employment sector
27%	Professional roles in higher education
21%	Public, charitable, and third sector
12%	Bioscience industry
8%	Manufacturing and engineering
6%	Health and social work

Notes

- Professional roles in higher education:**
e.g. research administration, grants management, commercialisation, knowledge exchange, lab management, technical support, public engagement, science communication, training and development, careers support.
- Public, charitable, and third sector:**
e.g. government, policy research and advocacy, grant administration, programme management, public engagement, science communication, business development and fundraising.

Further destinations

Other sectors each employing 2-4% of postdocs who had left academia were:

- Consultancy
- Finance, business, and IT
- Creative industries, including publishing;
- Other education (non-HE);
- Energy and mining.

2. Career satisfaction

- 87% stated that their doctorate had helped them 'to some extent' or 'to a great extent' to progress towards their long-term career aspirations.
(Impact of Doctoral Careers, p. 62)
- More than 80% were 'satisfied' in their current work, and half were 'very satisfied'.
(What do research staff do next?, p.12)

3. Now what?

What can you do with destination data like these?

Seeing them can:

- reassure** – by demonstrating that you are by no means alone if you are looking at options outside academia. Indeed, the data show that you don't have to leave the higher education sector even if you decide not to pursue the academic career path itself.
- provoke** – by stimulating your thinking, particularly if the patterns or numbers are surprising to you. What did you expect to find?
- galvanise** – by giving you ideas for further research (check out the other tip-sheets in this series) or by motivating you to get in touch with the PFDC for a one-to-one meeting.

4. References

The Impact of Doctoral Careers (RCUK, 2014)
www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/skills/timodcfullreport-pdf

What do research staff do next? (CRAC, 2016)
<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/reports/vitae-what-do-research-staff-do-next-2016.pdf>

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