Researcher Careers

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Background – ‘The Roberts Report’

Government report in 2002, ‘*SET for Success*’

Identified problems in the supply of people with high level skills

Recommendations for postgraduate researchers, including funding for general transferable skills training to increase employability.

Has had a profound influence on researcher skills and career training

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How PhD numbers have changed

In 2003, 8,795 EU citizens got PhDs from UK universities
7,270 UK citizens
1,525 EU citizens from countries outside the UK

By 2007, numbers had risen.
9,595 EU citizens got PhDs from UK universities
7,875 UK citizens
1,720 EU citizens from countries outside the UK

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PhD outcomes

2003: 4695 PhDs in survey

80.2% known to be working in the UK
3.2% known to be unemployed six months after graduating

2007: 5495 PhDs in survey

87.1% known to be working in the UK
3.1% known to be unemployed six months after graduating

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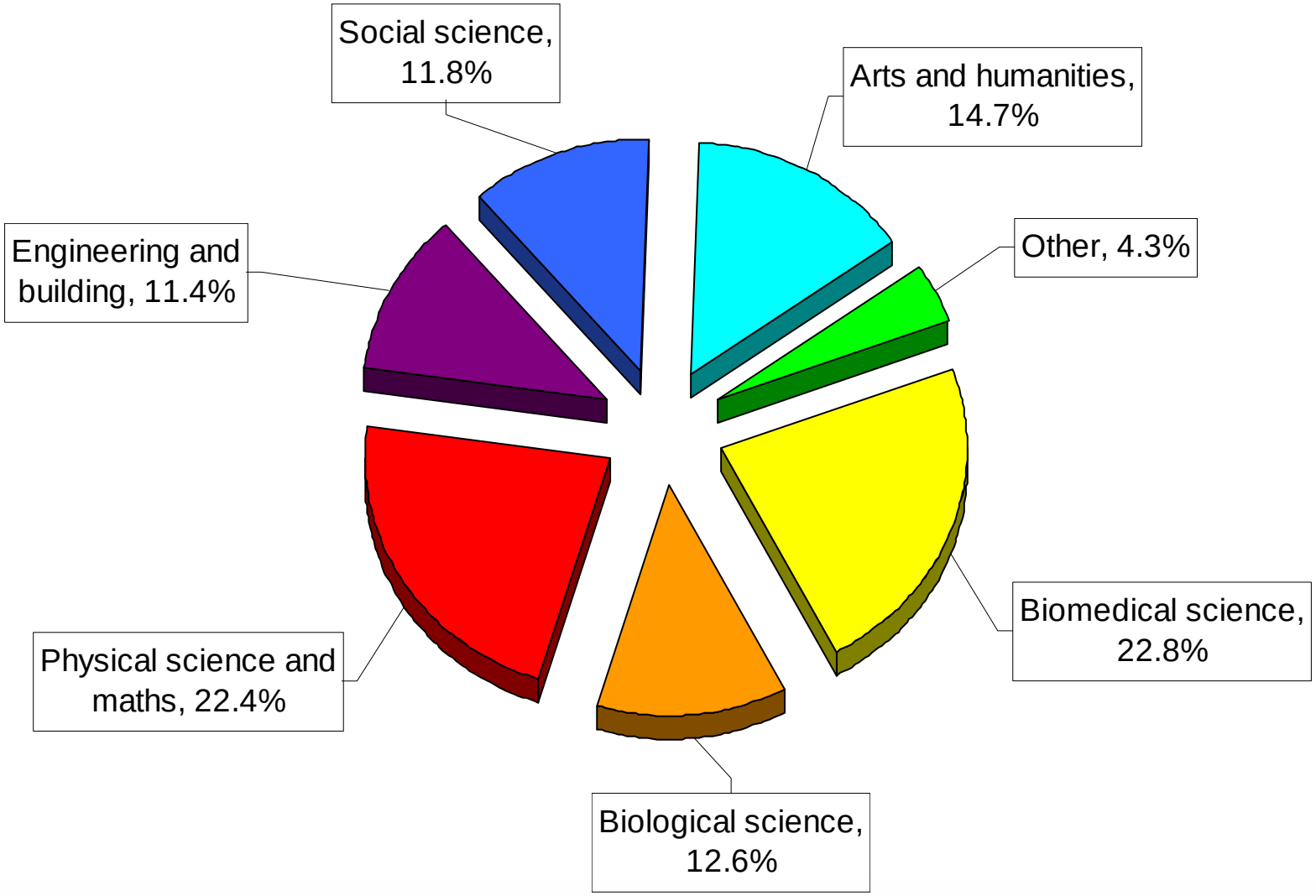
What did PhDs from 2007 study?



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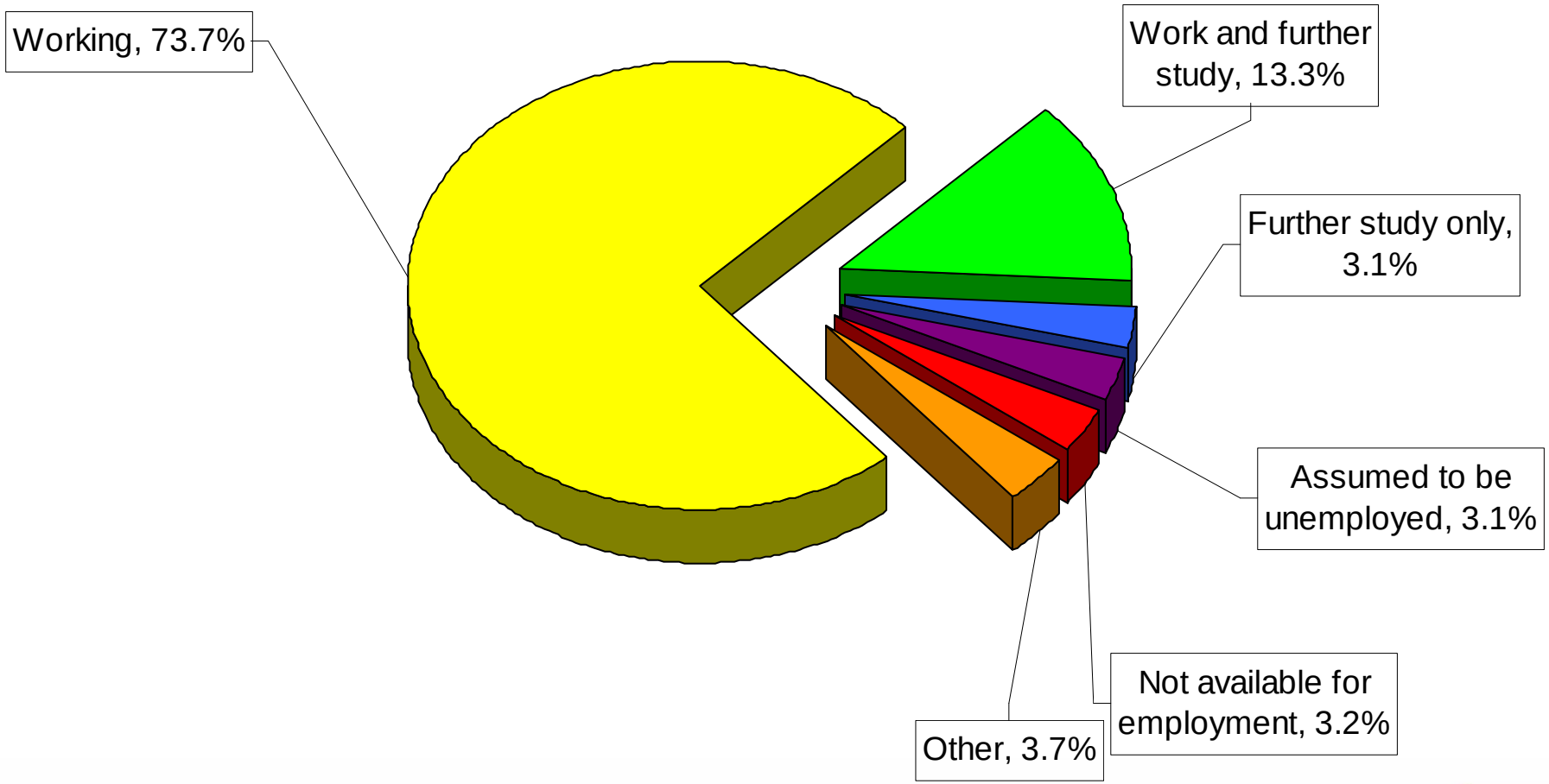
What did PhDs from 2007 do with their qualifications?



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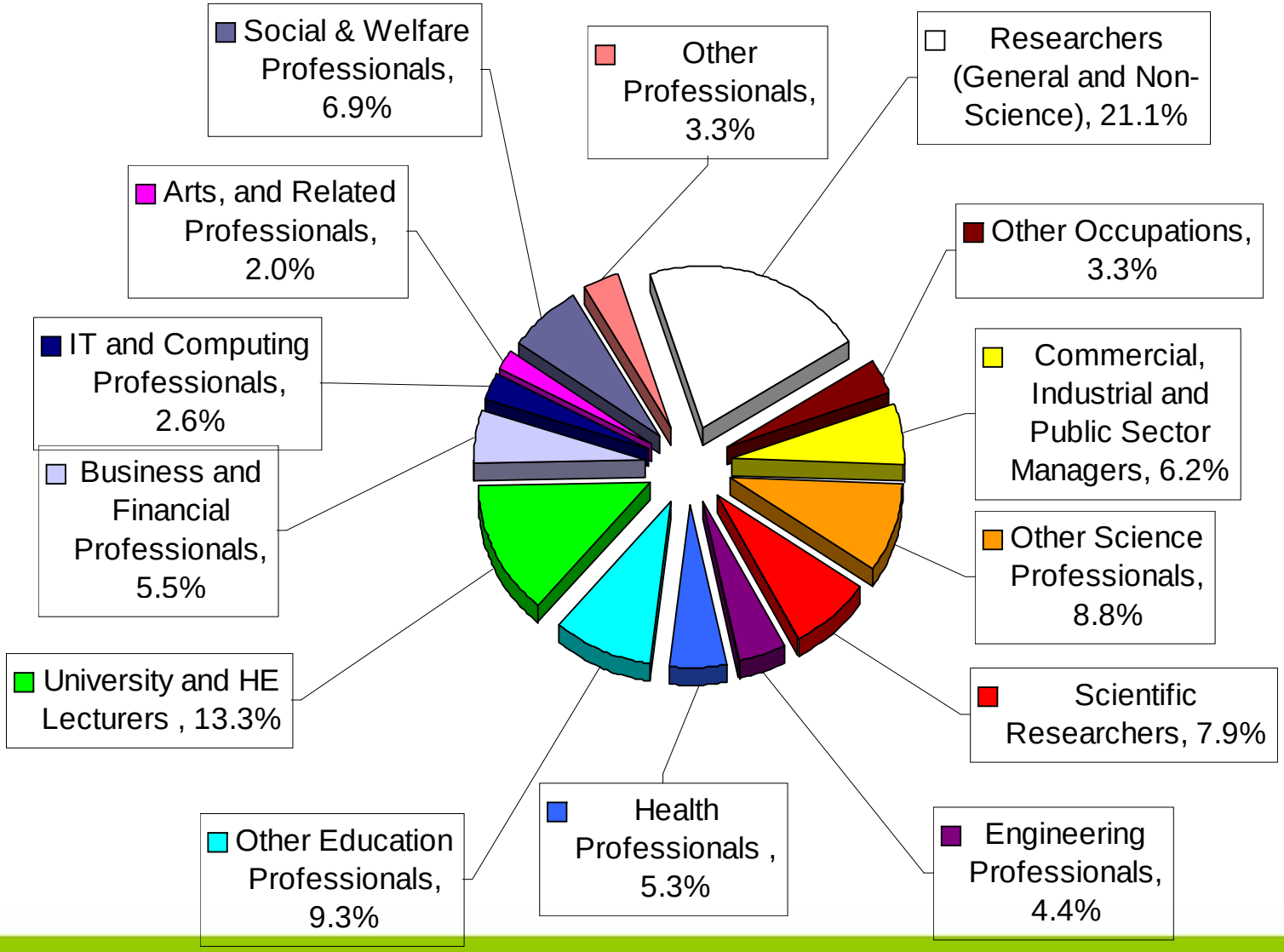
Work PhDs from 2007 did after graduating



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Is it all about academia?

From the data shown, less than half of PhD graduates from 2007 in our fields of interest were working in academic research six months after graduating.

As careers progress, there is a net movement of PhDs out of academia and into other sectors – public and private

The Roberts Review of 2002 estimated that only 20% of UK postdocs would ever be offered a permanent academic contract

What are the advantages of research experience?

Postgraduate researchers are one of the most highly educated and skilled groups in the UK

Research graduates gain skills in

- problem solving
- time management
- creative thinking

that UK business say that they need, and are hardest to find.

What are employers looking for?

"*We are looking for people who are intellectually very bright, of course. They need to be able to make decisions based on the evidence that is available to them. We look for written and spoken communication skills, we need people who can write well and be concise and to the point. They need to get on with people from all different positions and backgrounds… They need to be adaptable and pick up new skills and information quickly from different sources, so they also need to be interested in learning new skills throughout their career. We want them to have innovative ideas and be able to think their way around a problem and think of new ways to solve problems. We also need to be able to rely on them to deliver a result, that's important, so they need to be resilient and keep going in adversity too, we have to know they can keep going*"

Employers perspectives…

- Self belief, self reliance and confidence

When I left my viva after passing my PhD, I felt like I could achieve anything, so I started at the Civil Service with a lot of self-confidence, even though I knew the work would be challenging and very different to my research.

Tracey, Civil Servant

What it also shows is that the individual is able to set and achieve goals, manage their own time, think both analytically and creatively, and overcome problems; a set of highly desirable skills and attitudes in any professional person.

English Nature

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Employers perspectives…

- Problem solving and sharper intellect

In this department we look for bright young people who come to us with new ideas and the ability to think about problems in novel ways – lateral thinkers. We've found that PhD graduates offer all of these things

Albion Colours

Apart from their obvious knowledge, what makes PhD graduates stand out is the quality of their brains – they are experts at analytical thinking and can work their way through complicated processes without being intimidated.

Science Recruitment Group

Employment outside academia

Most researchers will ultimately find work outside academia

- Entry points are often less visible than for undergraduates
- Many companies do not have formal postgraduate level positions
- There are widespread misconceptions about the skills a postgraduate can bring to a company
- BUT researchers often fail to articulate their skills well
- Many employers do have a high opinion of postgraduate qualifications and of their postgraduate employees

Questions

- What is a researcher? What is a research career?
- Do research roles follow broadly similar patterns?
- Which areas of the economy need researchers?
- What qualifications are we actually looking for?
- What do employers want from researchers?
- Do we do enough to guide and support research careers?

Key messages:

- Researchers and PhDs offer a full package of skills and attributes
- PhD qualifications can take graduates beyond academia and research
- PhD graduates contribute to all sectors and occupations
- Employers value generic skills as well as specific knowledge
- PhDs are increasingly able to articulate their skills using the language of employers – this ability is vital to their future careers

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