

Is redeployment a feasible response to contract precarity in early research careers? Converging evidence from three studies

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Precurity and Redeployment

- **Redeployment policies** have been suggested as one way to mitigate precarity among ECRs
- To assess feasibility, we investigated:

ECR perspective

Do ECRs find it appealing?

Institutional and PI perspective

Are PIs amenable to it?

Job availability

Is it viable?

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*Discrete Choice
Experiment*

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Study 1: ECR perspective

Discrete Choice
Experiment

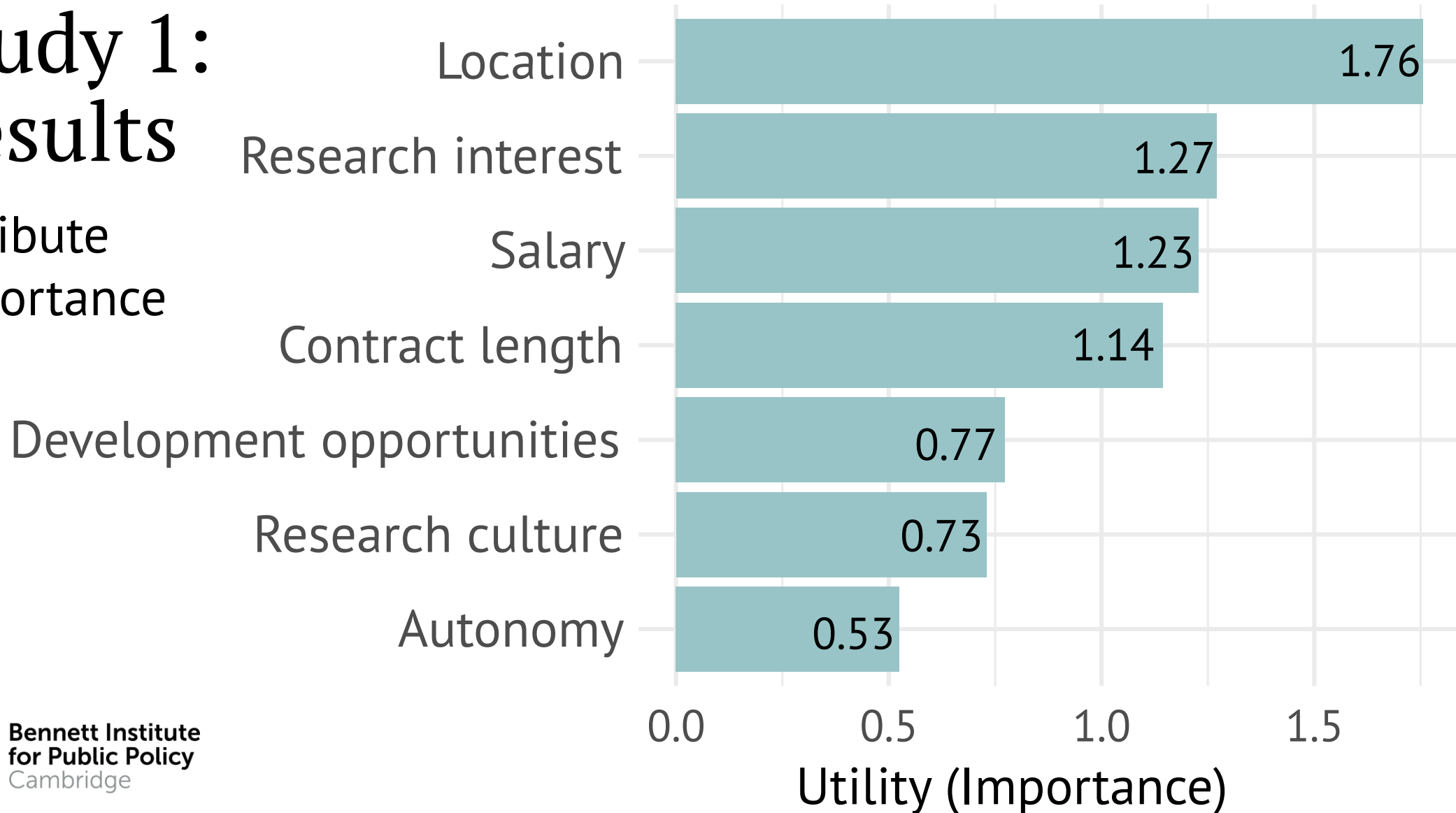
810 UK-based ECRs
12 choice questions

Your contract is ending, and you have been offered the following two positions. Which one will you accept?

	Position A	Position B	Prefer to look elsewhere
Autonomy	Some freedom	Great freedom	
Location	Same institution	A different institution in a current or a commutable city	
Research interest	Low alignment	Some alignment	
Contract length	4 years	3 years	
Research culture	Some match	High match	
Development opportunities	Some opportunity	Great opportunity	
Salary	5% higher	5% lower	
Please select:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

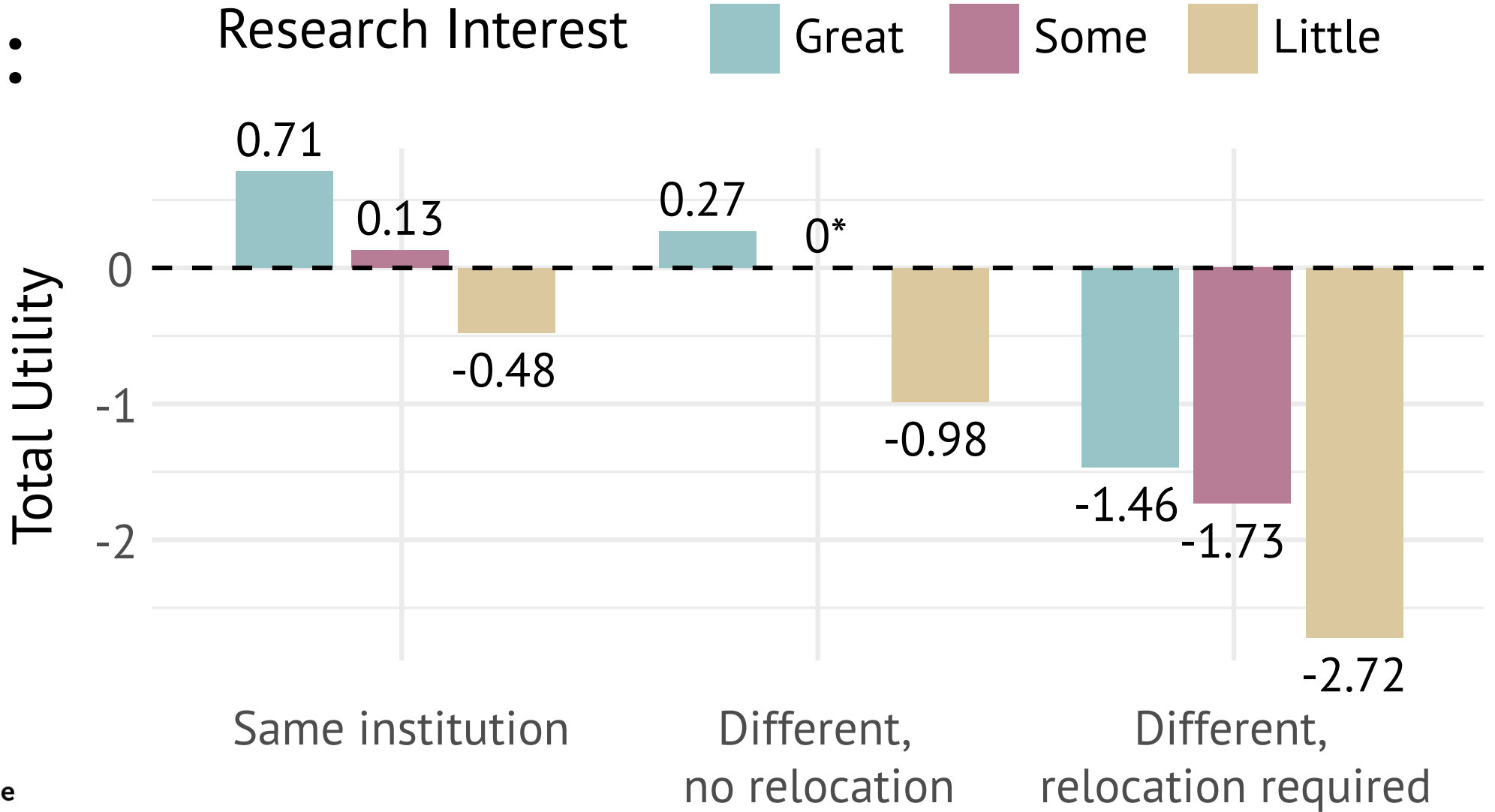
Study 1: Results

Attribute
Importance



Study 1: Results

Interaction



* Values relative to

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*Interviews and policy
documents analysis*

Job availability

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Study 2: Institutional + PI perspectives

Document analysis

Redeployment policies from
32 HEI (27 research-intensive
universities)

Analysis

- Distinction between research/non-research positions
- Eligibility criteria
- Employee-employer tensions

PI Interviews

10 Cambridge PIs

Analysis (major themes)

- Assumptions of redeployed candidates
- Incentives
- Effects of redeployment
- Experience with redeployment
- Internal vs external candidates

Study 2: Results

Document analysis

- Generally, common policy for research/non-research positions
- Differences in eligibility (duration, visa)
- No incentives for PI offered
- About half pre-advertise/ring-fence positions for internal candidates

PI Interviews

- PIs want the best candidates, regardless of origin
- Redeployed candidates are infrequent
- Little feasibility in terms of narrow skill set often required
- Redeployment might be good for short-term fill

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Job matching using large language models

Study 3: Job availability

Job A

Job B

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Education		
A PhD in a relevant specialist subject (e.g. Immunology, Computational Biology, Genomics).	✓	
Specialist knowledge & skills		
Experience of analysing bulk RNA sequencing data	✓	
Experience of analysing single cell RNA/antigen receptor sequencing data	✓	
Understanding of ATAC seq approaches	✓	
Understanding of ethics of working with human tissue samples	✓	
Experience of planning research projects	✓	
Experience of analysing imaging/spatial data	✓	
Experience of writing manuscripts for publication	✓	
Experience of developing data analysis methodology		✓
Experience of grant writing		✓
Interpersonal & communication skills		
Good communication and presentation skills	✓	
Ability to work within a team	✓	
Relevant experience		
A strong publication record	✓	

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Education		
Holds a PhD (or equivalent experience) in psychology, neuroscience, or related discipline		
Appointment at Research Associate level is dependent on having a PhD or equivalent experience, including those who have submitted but not yet received their PhD. Where a PhD has not yet been awarded, appointment will initially be made at Senior Research Assistant and amended to Research Associate when the PhD is awarded (PhD needs to be awarded within 6 months of the start date).		
Specialist Knowledge and skills		
Advanced knowledge in at least one statistical software package (e.g. R, Matlab, SPSS)	✓	
Ability to analyse, synthesise and articulate research findings	✓	
Attention to detail		✓
Relevant experience		
Experience of data analysis	✓	
Experience of running studies with human participants	✓	
Experience of running research MRI protocols	✓	
Experience of managing own workload		
Communication skills		
Good interpersonal and communication skills		
Ability to work independently and as part of a team		

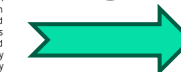
1. Further particulars text extraction

2. Text summary using LLM

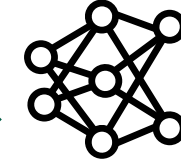
3. Pairwise comparisons



...An exciting new opportunity for a Postdoctoral Research Associate has become available within the Bivalve Transmissible Neoplasia Group (www.zoo.cam.ac.uk/btn), a newly-established small, interactive and international research team based at the Department of Zoology, with strong collaborative links with other groups in Cambridge and beyond. The groups research is focused on the genetics and evolution of a recently discovered family of clonally transmissible cancers which affect several species of marine bivalves...

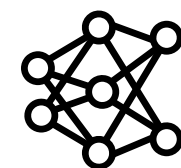


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Job A

Job B



Study 3: Preliminary Results

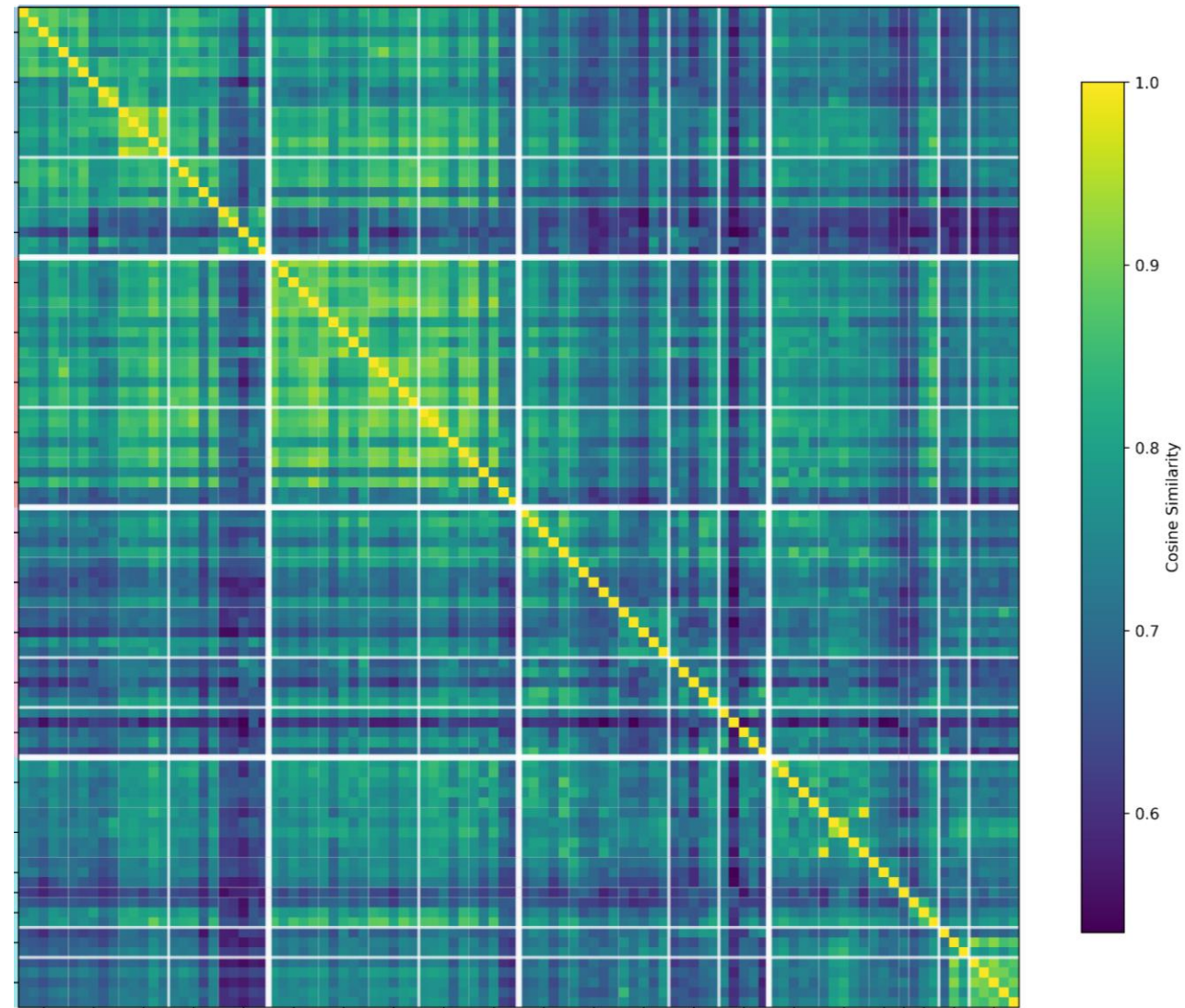
Results from a
sample of 100
ECR jobs, sampled
by REF2021 Main
Panel

Life &
Med

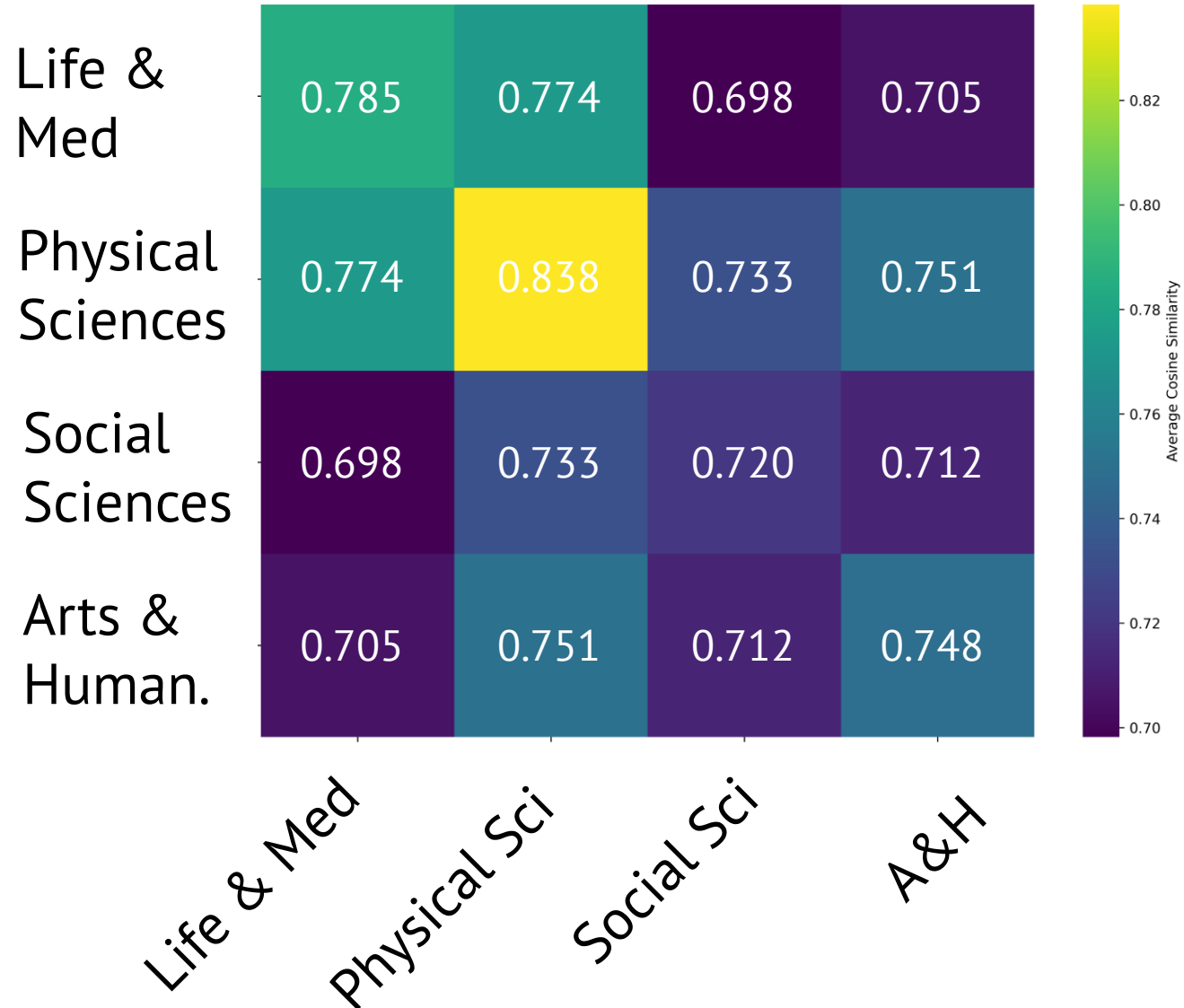
Physical
Sciences

Social
Sciences

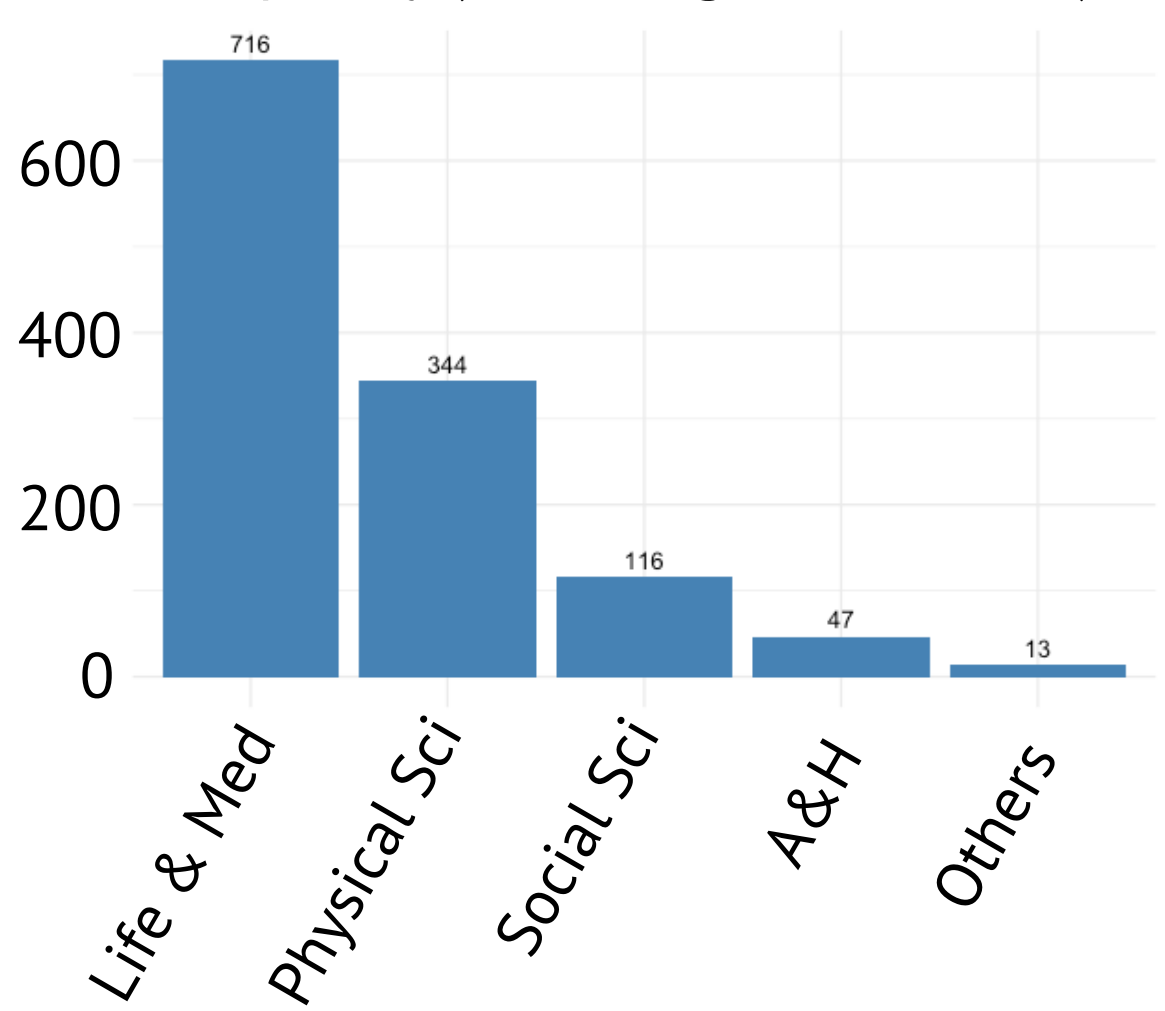
Arts &
Human.



Aggregation by REF2021 UoA submission



Job frequency (Cambridge 2022-2023)



(preliminary) Conclusions

- ECRs try to avoid relocating, but low research interest jobs are undesirable
- Little incentive for PIs to engage with redeployment policy
- PIs want best candidates; required skillset might be highly specific
- Lower viability in SHAPE disciplines, where positions are also scarcer

Caveats

- Desirability might differ between ECR subgroups
- Only Cambridge's PIs represented
- Viability analysis can't account for new skills acquired during post



Where do we go from here?

Adapt
redeployment
policies?

Prefer to look
elsewhere?

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Learn more at the
[ARRC project website](#)

