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

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Precarity and Redeployment

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

ECR perspective	**Institutional and PI perspective**	**Job availability**
Do ECRs find it appealing?	Are PIs amenable to it?	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

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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:	◌	◌	◌

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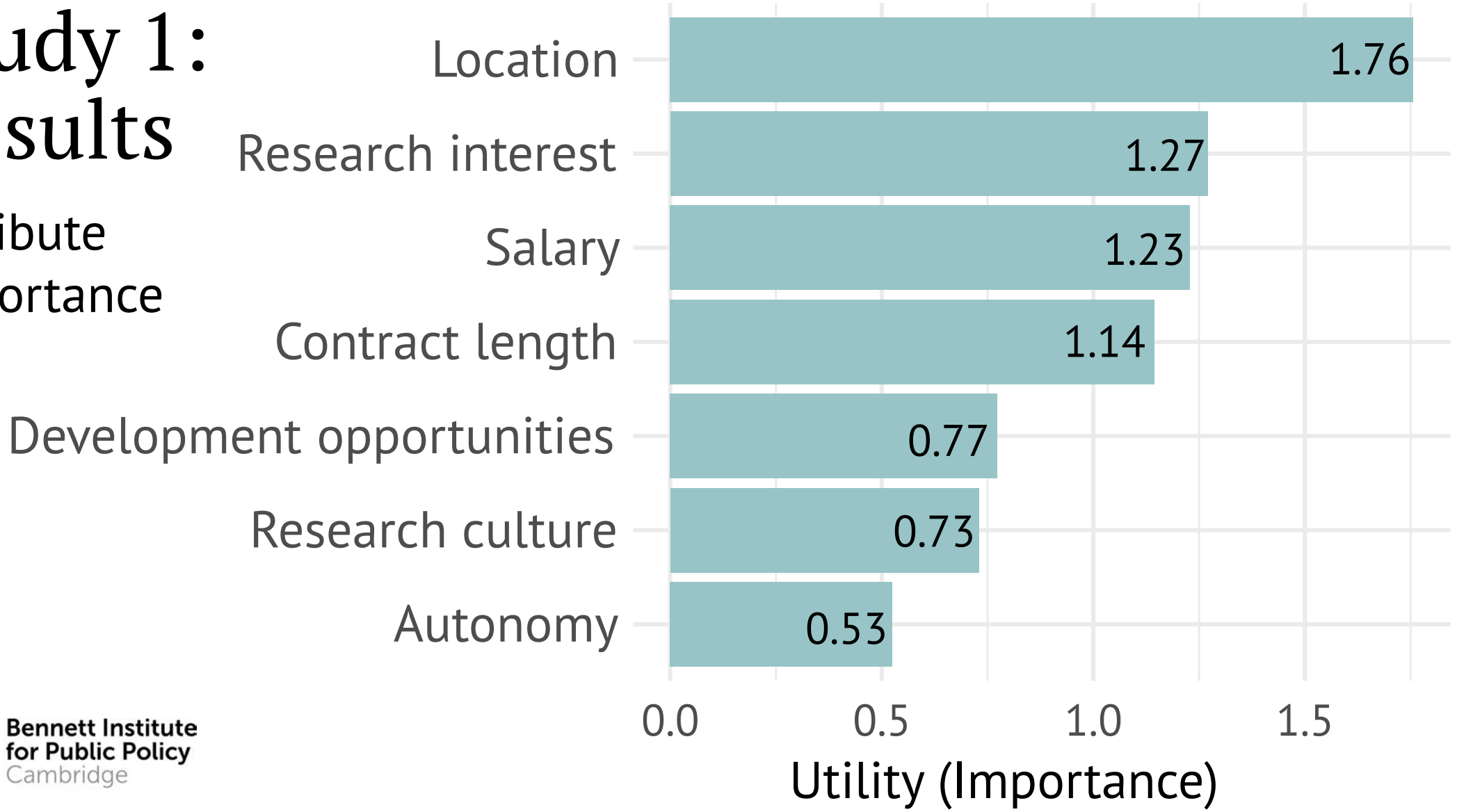
Study 1: Results

Attribute Importance



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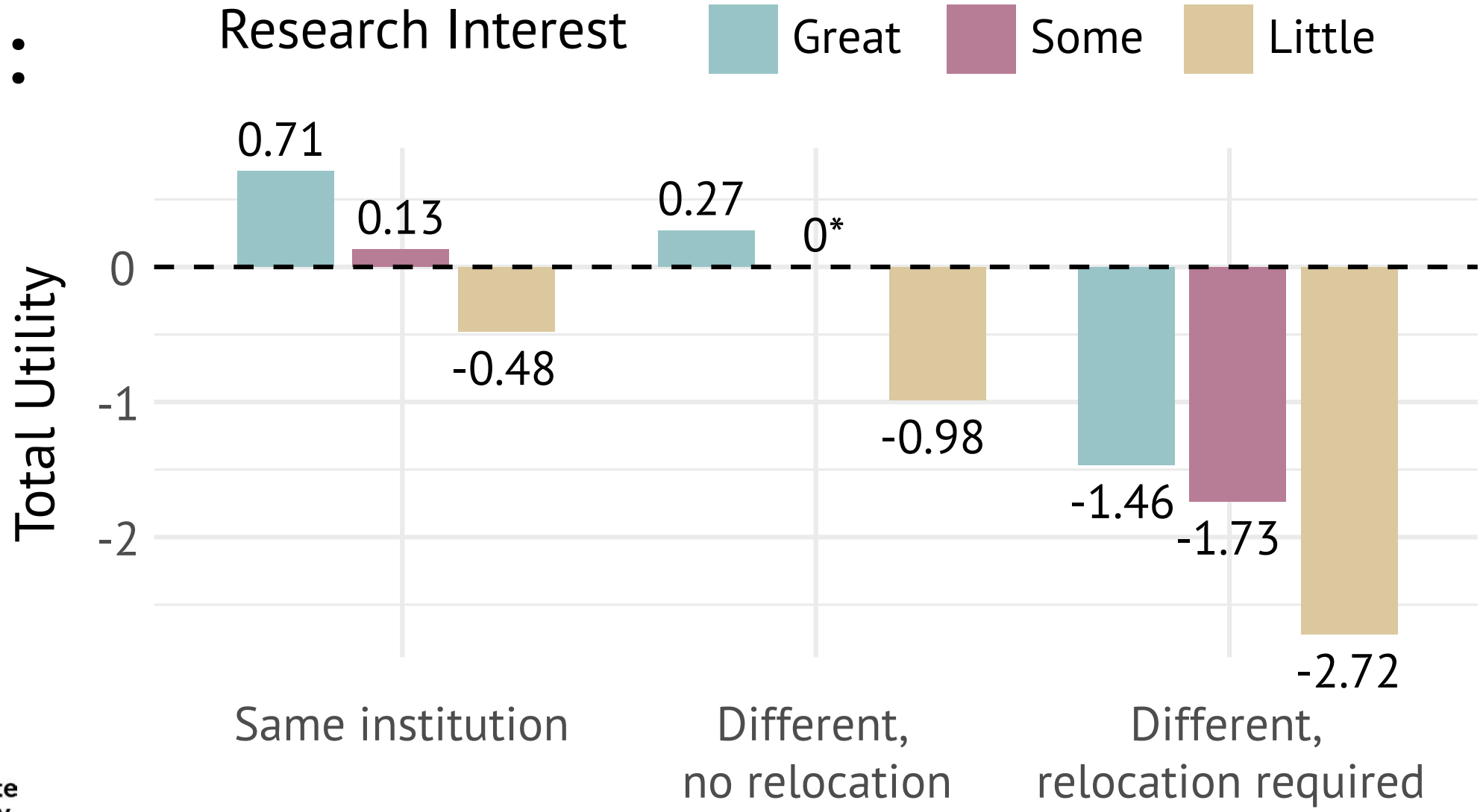
Study 1: Results

Interaction



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* Values relative to

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Discrete Choice Experiment	Interviews and policy documents analysis	

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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

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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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Discrete Choice Experiment	Interviews and policy documents analysis	Job matching using large language models

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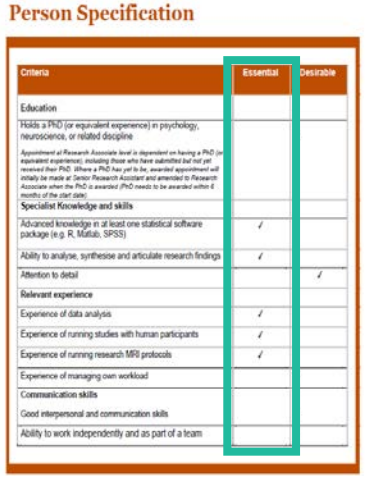
Study 3: Job availability

Job A

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	✓	

Job B



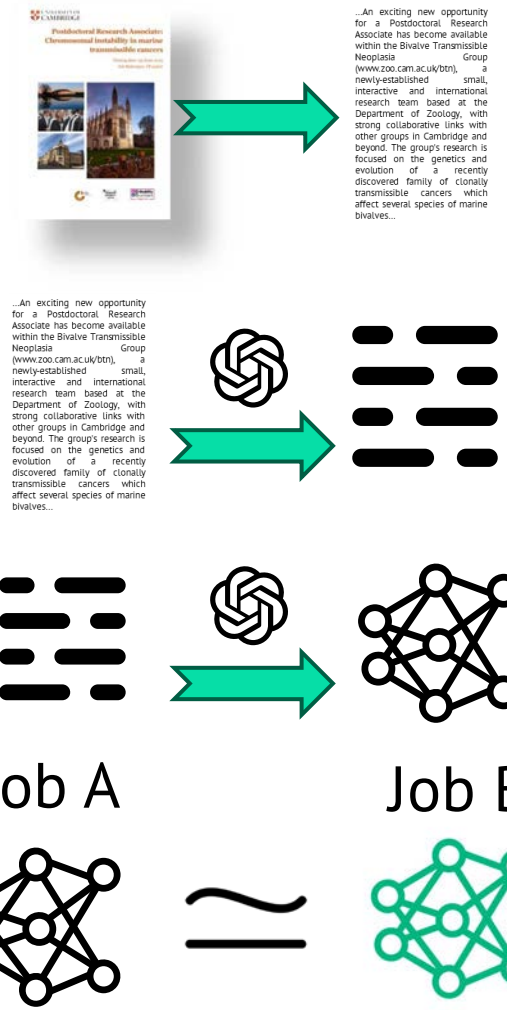
Person Specification

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 yet to be, 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



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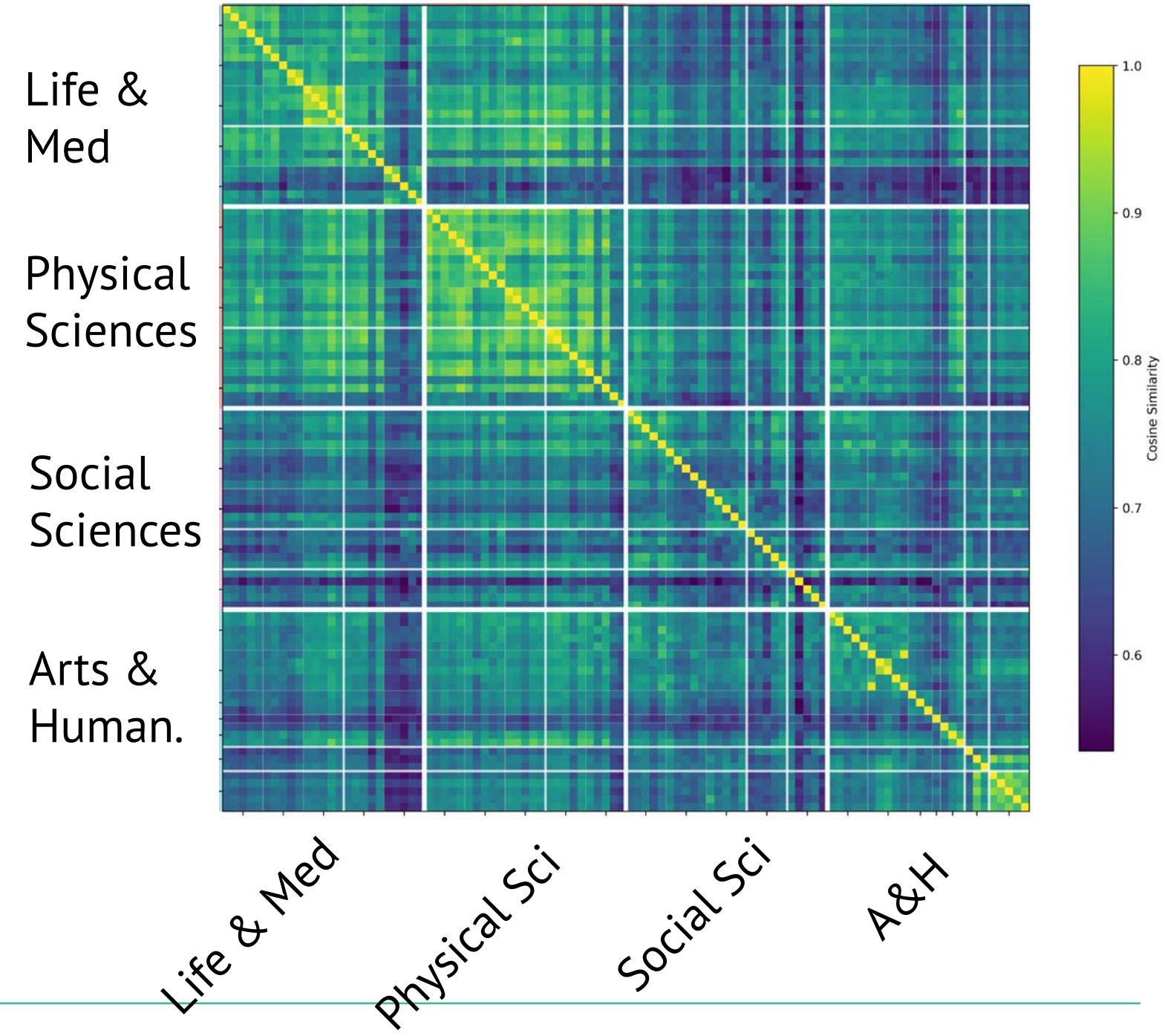
Study 3: Preliminary Results

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



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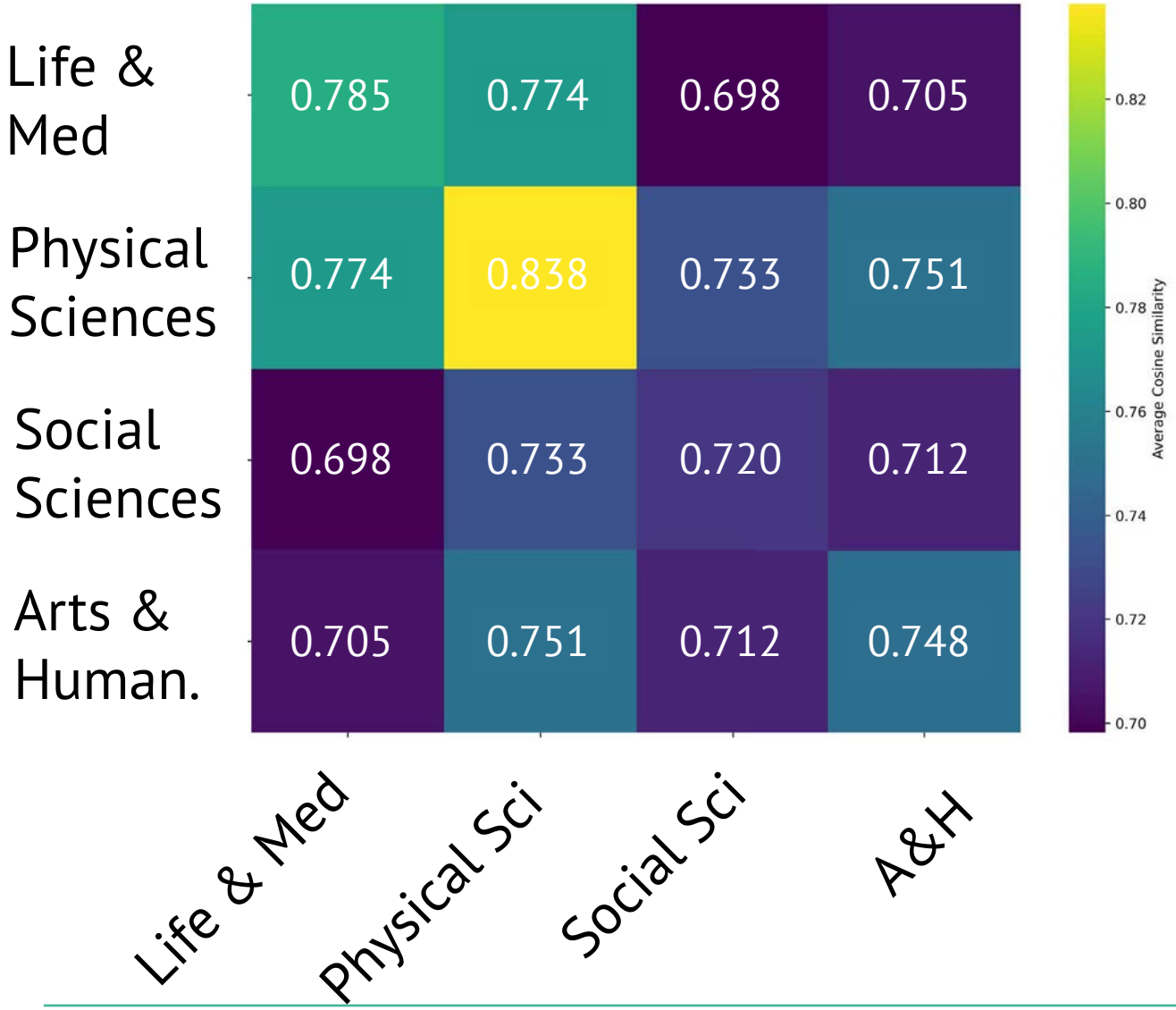
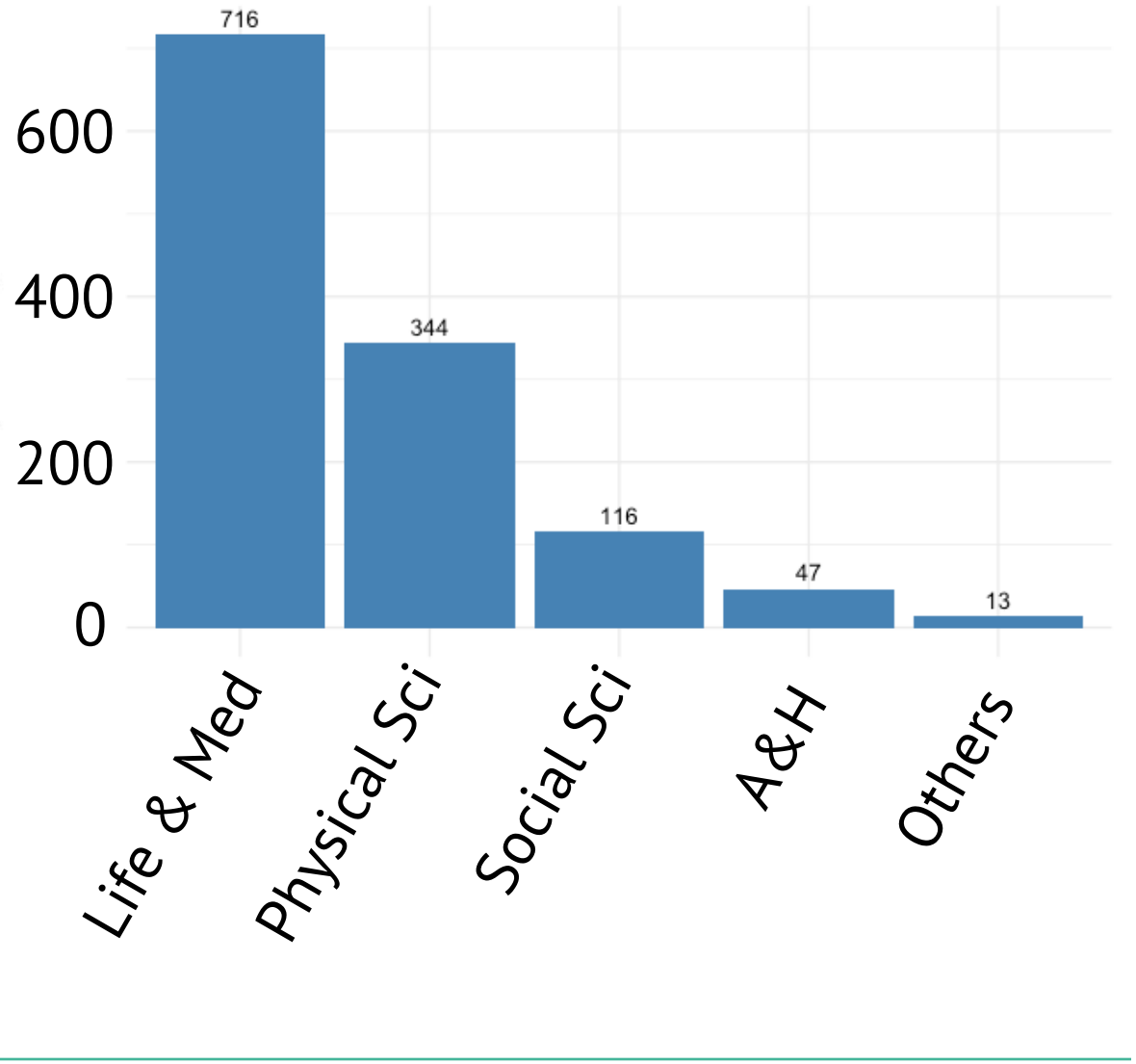
Aggregation by REF2021 UoA submission



Job frequency (Cambridge 2022-2023)



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(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

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Where do we go from here?

Adapt redeployment policies?

Prefer to look elsewhere?

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UKRI Research England

ARRC
ACTION RESEARCH ON RESEARCH CULTURE

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Learn more at the [ARRC project website]

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