



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



9th April 2026

Dame Chi Onwurah MP
Chair, Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Dame Chi Onwurah and members of the Science Innovation and Technology Committee,

During our 4th March oral evidence session on scientific research funding, you set us homework to map the long-term career path of STFC funded researchers. As STFC does not routinely record this information, we conducted a survey of STFC-funded PhD supervisors. With 2,354 submissions, spanning every UK Physics and Astronomy department, we have collected data which tracks the career paths of a significant fraction of the total number of STFC studentships funded from 2010 onwards.

Our data spans roughly 1,000 students from each of the particle physics and astrophysics disciplines, with another ~300 from Nuclear and Accelerator Science. 77% of our STFC-funded students were UK nationals, with the remaining 23% of studentships attracting global talent from abroad.

The two most common careers for STFC-funded PhD students are to remain in academia (~30%) or to work in AI and data science (~25%). The range of other careers are broad and extensive, covering industry (engineering, manufacturing, robotics and the space sector), climate science, medical physics support scientists at STFC facilities and national labs, defence and security, finance, secondary and further education, quantum computing, and media and science communication roles.

By comparing the careers for graduates from 2010 to today, we can map how quickly researchers transition from the university to the private sector after their PhD. For the most recent graduates (2024-2026), 48% move directly into the private sector, 46% choose short-term (typically 2-3yr) PPAN postdoctoral research positions for their first career, with the other 6% working in other academic roles. Under 1% of our sample were currently seeking employment.

We find that the fraction of STFC-funded PhD students in academia decreases to roughly 30% as their career progresses. Many transition to careers in AI and data science after completing their first postdoctoral position. Almost a third of our 2020-2023 graduates are currently working in AI and data science. For the researchers who choose to remain in academia, the transition from fixed-term contracts to permanent faculty positions occurs over the course of ~10years. For our students who graduated in 2010-2014, 24% are now PPAN faculty, 3% are faculty in other specialisms, with another 7% remaining in postdoctoral positions.

These results (appended below) are just a first-look at the data we have collected. Our data will form part of a wider study which we will publish later on in the year. We wanted to share this with you promptly, however, to provide statistical evidence of the impressive talent pipeline that STFC-funded curiosity driven science has created.

We believe this demonstrates that these subject areas are already, and have been for many years, a powerful contributor to the growth of the UK economy via the people and skills they enable, especially in rapidly changing and high technology areas.

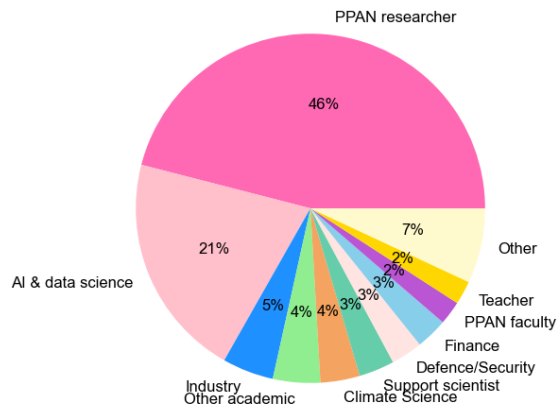
Yours faithfully,

Prof. Jon Butterworth, Prof. Catherine Heymans and Dr. Simon Williams

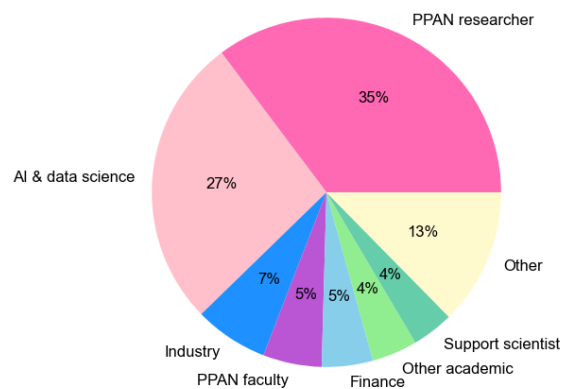




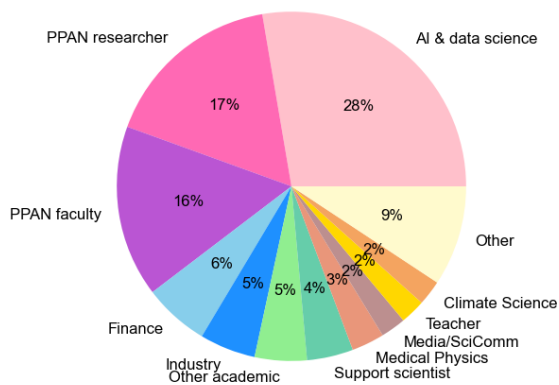
Current career types for students who graduated in 2024-2026



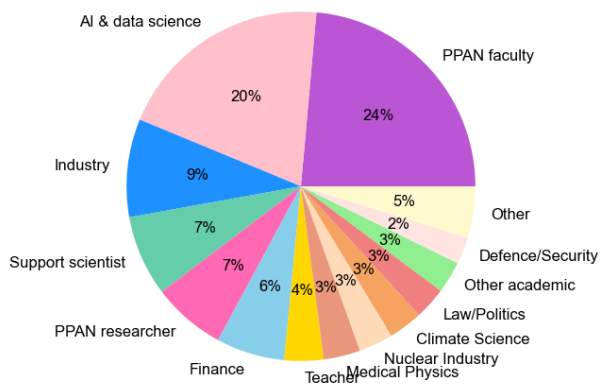
Current career types for students who graduated in 2020-2023



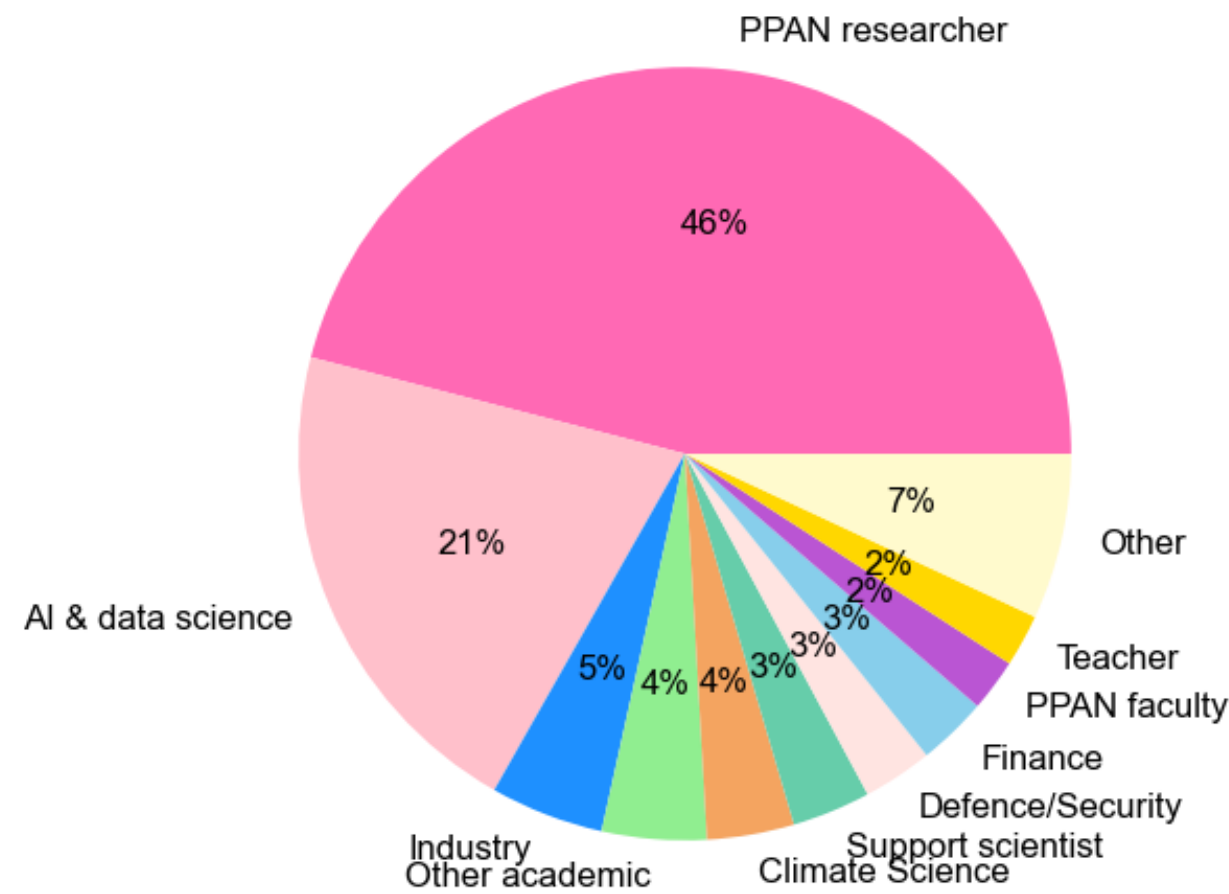
Current career types for students who graduated in 2015-2019



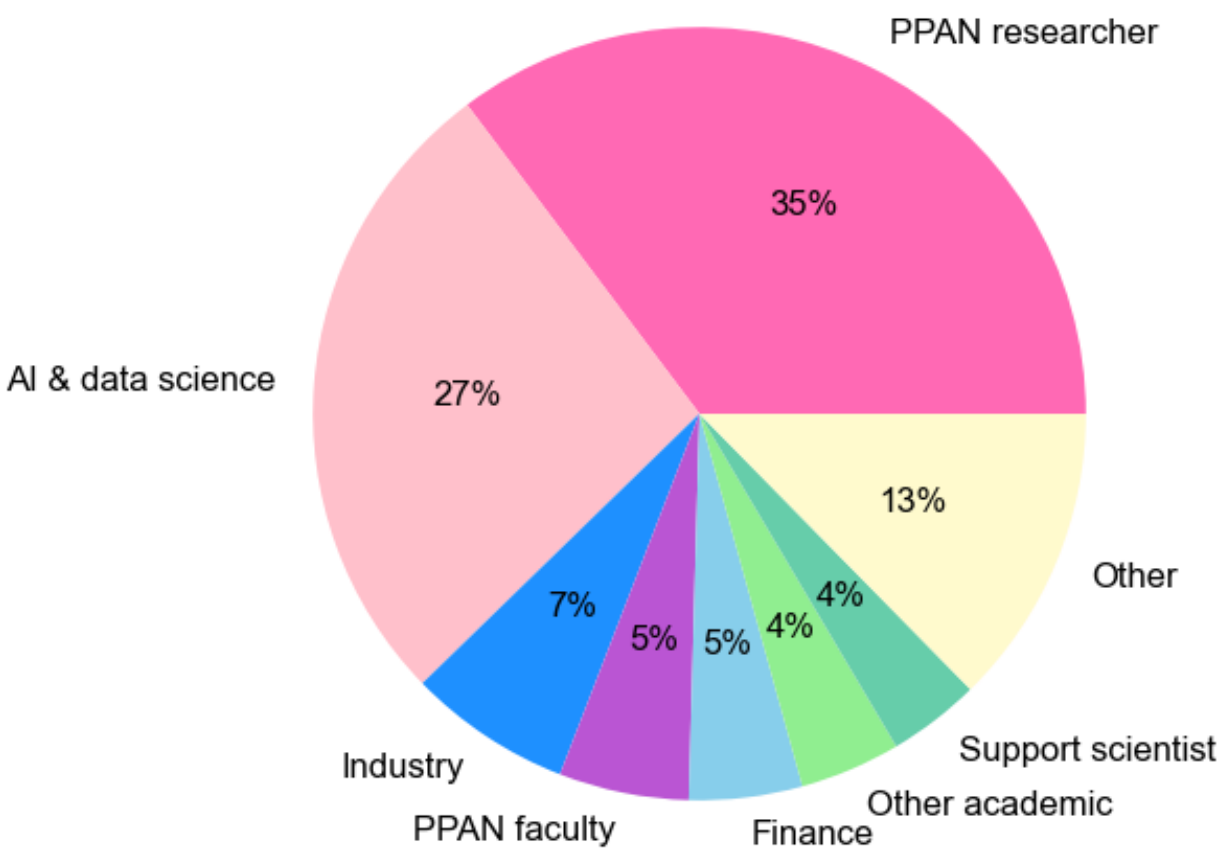
Current career types for students who graduated in 2010-2014



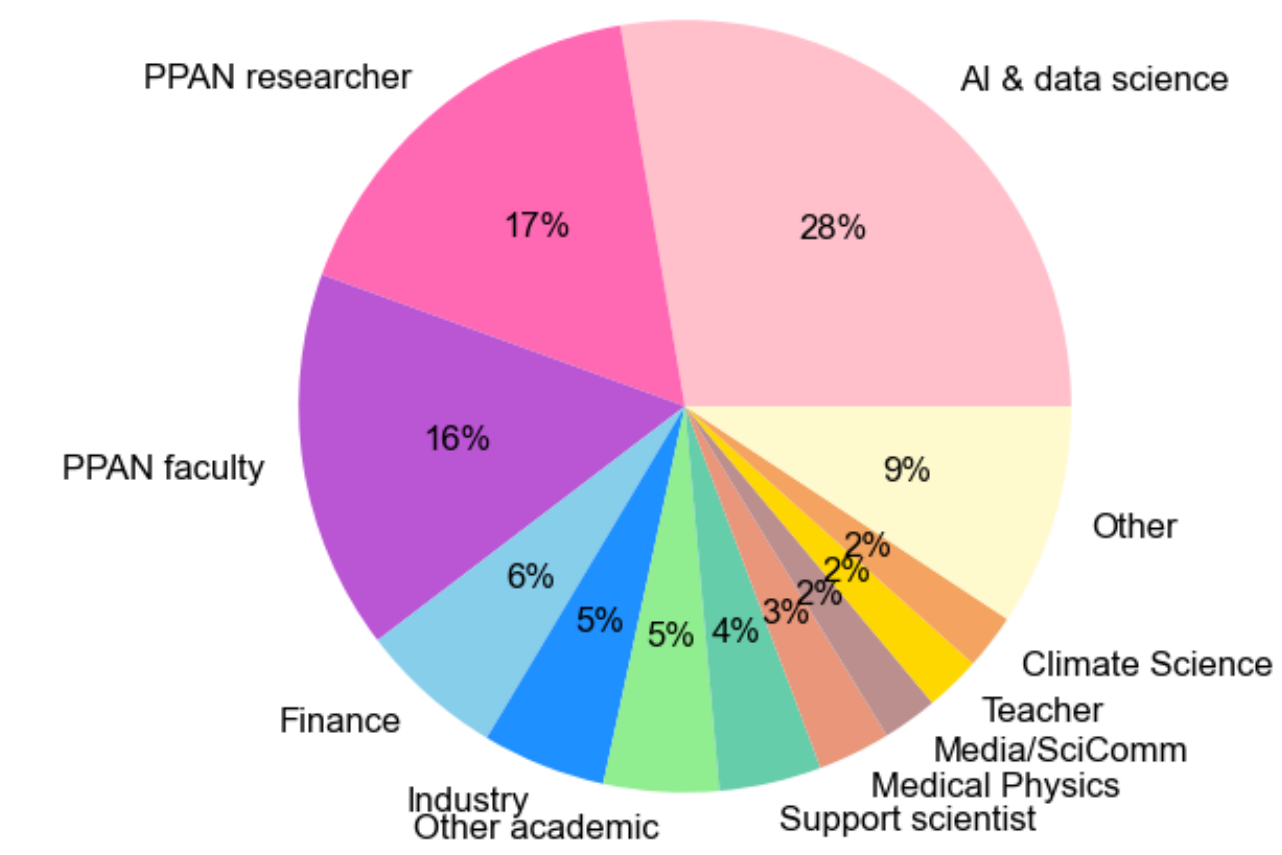
Current career types for students who graduated in 2024-2026



Current career types for students who graduated in 2020-2023



Current career types for students who graduated in 2015-2019



Current career types for students who graduated in 2010-2014

