THIS WEEK

EDITORIALS

WORLD VIEW Don't despair, politicians are listening really **p.587**

GREENLAND Ice rebound suggests more glaciers are going **p.588**

ADDICT ANT Insects can't just say no to morphine **p.590**

Life after academia

A report shows how young scientists are finding career satisfaction after leaving academic research. That path should be celebrated.

Emily wanted to see other people. Stuart had enjoyed a string of short-term relationships but realized that he needed more commitment. After years of uncertainty and making do, Fiona decided to follow her heart. Most found the decision emotional and stressful and felt guilty. Some worried that they were being superficial — but freely admitted they were leaving for the money.

The stress of ending their relationship with an academic research career was difficult for these young scientists and others. Most of them, after a while, realized that they had made the right decision. Still, a few later regretted what they decided had been a too-hasty exit, and wanted to patch things up. Such is life.

Most importantly, all these people believe that they have learned from the experience and want to help others — people like you — who might be experiencing or considering a break-up. Their advice is the same as that offered by friends, family and advice columnists for centuries: if you're not happy, then it's not right.

Significant numbers of *Nature*'s readers are not happy. They complain, in surveys and directly to us, of their dissatisfaction with their new (and not so new) careers in research. The hours, the workload, the instability of postdoc positions, the expectations, the low pay, the pressure and competition, the lack of opportunities and the fear of failure: all can combine to make the early-career years difficult indeed. The same is true in many other jobs, but young scientists have more reason than most to be disillusioned when things do not go to plan. Almost all have completed a PhD. And almost all would have been told that the qualification — and the effort and dedication involved — was the first step on the ladder to a permanent academic position.

Nature and others have long pointed out that this is a lie. There are simply too many PhD students and too few senior posts. Hence the purgatory of the postdocs: trapped in transition and trying to accrue the necessary credit to move on.

It can be a severe blow to people in this position to realize that their fate lies elsewhere, that they will never pass through the gates of academia to find research contentment (or at least a reliable and decent salary). So, although the situation can be difficult, a report that surveys scientists who have made the jump elsewhere, and landed happily, should offer some comfort.

Produced by the Careers Research and Advisory Centre in Cambridge, UK, with help from others including Naturejobs, the report *What Do Research Staff Do Next?* analyses the survey responses of Emily, Stuart, Fiona and hundreds of former full-time academic researchers from across Europe who left to pursue other careers. Forget the redundant clichés. These were no 'failures' or people who 'couldn't cope with the pace'. More than three-quarters of them had published as a principal author and one-fifth had published a paper in a high-impact journal such as *Nature*. One-quarter had managed to secure a competitive grant.

Nor were they wide-eyed youngsters, rudely put in their place by the reality of the workplace. Most were in their thirties and almost one-third had a decade's experience. Perhaps most telling of all, eight in ten of them had aspired to an academic career. They changed their minds for three main reasons: they wanted better long-term prospects, they wanted more job security and they were no longer prepared to be employed on short-term and fixed contracts.

In most cases, they got what they wanted. More than four in five were satisfied in their new jobs. Many had managed to stay in touch with science, and worked in a related function such as administration, outreach or publishing.

"These were no 'failures' or people who 'couldn't cope with the pace'."

Science should wish them well. As *Nature* has pointed out before, a regular flow of bright, highly trained and scientifically literate workers heading into the wider world can only benefit society and science. It is time to normalize these sideways steps, and for universities, senior scientists and research funders to accept and embrace the different paths that young researchers choose to follow. More honest and realistic career advice would be a good start. In most cases, the survey shows that these scientists were not forced out: they made an active choice to head elsewhere. And the outside world was delighted to have them. ■

Climate ambition

It might not be possible to restrict warming to 1.5 °C — but we should still try.

The governments of the world have taken their time to tackle global warming. Now, at the request of those governments, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is assessing the impacts of 1.5 °C of warming, as well as ways to prevent temperatures from rising higher. Yet there is precious little science to assess, as a similar panel within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change reported last year. The reason is simple: many scientists wrote off the chances of limiting warming to 1.5 °C years ago, and instead focused their energy on the still-aggressive goal of 2 °C.

This is understandable. The 2015 Paris climate agreement commits governments to keeping average global surface temperatures to between 1.5 °C and 2 °C above the preindustrial level. But warming has already passed the 1-degree mark, and some estimates suggest that even if current commitments are fully implemented, they would allow temperatures to rise nearly 3 °C. If the 2-degree goal seems