

# CAREERS

**UNIVERSITIES** How administrators can attract top postdoc talent **p.624**

**BY THE NUMBERS** Tennessee capitalizes on a national lab and a low cost of living **p.625**

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when they become postdocs,” she says.

The results may encourage PhD students by showing them that their qualifications are useful outside academic research: a little more than half of the 92% of respondents who were in employment worked outside the higher-education sector. This will be a surprise to some potential employers, says Janet Metcalfe, chairwoman of Vitae. “It is important to see that doctoral graduates are not just a contribution to the academic sector,” she says. Many of those working outside higher education reported that skills learned during their doctorates helped them to be “creative and innovative” in their current jobs. But there was a disconnect when it came to work dynamics: graduates with jobs in non-academic settings reported frequently working alone as students but in teams as professionals. Tim Brown, former general secretary of the National Postgraduate Committee, a UK charity promoting postgraduate interests, hopes that highlighting this will encourage universities to train students properly to work in groups.

Bondareva says that the results will go a long way towards addressing employers’ misconceptions about doctoral graduates — for example, that their education rarely teaches them management skills helpful in business. And Metcalfe hopes that they will reach those who might have regarded doctoral graduates as too narrowly focused and too expensive to employ, compared with graduates fresh from their first degree. Such data should, she says, help policymakers see that people with PhDs make a useful contribution to the UK economy.

A 2002 review of UK higher education by physicist Gareth Roberts recommended that the government should fund training for PhD students in transferable skills such as forming teams, managing people and communicating effectively. But that ‘Roberts money’ will run out at the end of March 2011. Rick Rylance, champion for research careers at Research Councils UK in Swindon, the strategic partnership of Britain’s research councils, says the results of Vitae’s survey show that such training is useful, and should inform discussions among policymakers on how to fund graduate-student training once the Roberts money runs out.

“Tradition was that PhD graduates would carry on in academia, at least for some while, but that trend has clearly changed,” says Brown. With this change comes a need to prepare PhD candidates for life after university, he adds. ■

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## TRAINING

# The career doctor

*A survey of UK PhD holders shows that their skills do transfer to employment, and many graduates aren’t bound for academia.*

BY KATHARINE SANDERSON

A survey of UK PhD holders three-and-a-half years after graduation shows that only 2% are unable to find work, that more work outside academia than within it, and that the average PhD earns £10,000 (US\$15,600) more than someone with just a first degree.

The poll of 2,073 doctoral graduates was administered by Vitae, an organization based in Cambridge, UK, that supports people with PhDs in their professional development. Scientists

made up 72.7% of respondents: 39.7% of the total were in biological and biomedical sciences, and 33% in physical sciences and engineering. The results concentrate on the respondents’ employment sectors, salaries and assessments of their roles in the workplace.

The survey provides much-needed data, says Liliya Bondareva, a board member of Brussels-based organization Eurodoc, which supports PhD candidates and graduates throughout Europe. “We don’t have enough general information about graduates, let alone what they do