

IS THERE A LIFE AFTER THE PHD ?

ugliest
slide
ever ?

Foreword

for the on-line version

- These slides were presented at the “Young Scientists Day“ at ISIR (Sorbonne Université). The goal is to provide a very general introduction to **life after the PhD**. The scope is mostly targeted at young scientists located in France (but some info can be extrapolated I guess).
- The **audience** was mostly made of (french or non-french) PhD students and Postdocs with background on computer science (ML, optimisation, interaction, modelling, etc.), robotics (mobile, swarm, medical), control & automation, neuroscience, or in a few other topics (physics, humanities, etc.).
- I am an academic, *not* a job hunting specialist. Opinions are my own. So: **discuss with your friends, colleagues and supervisors** (whose job it is to advise you!), and keep your own critical judgment.
- These slides were done in 2026 (they will be outdated at some point, double-check!). If you want to **re-use them**, please do (and, if you have time, just post me a message. I’d be curious to hear about your experience)

“a study by the American Psychiatric Association (2017) found that 92% of graduate students felt anxious during their first year”

The **impostor phenomenon** among doctoral students: a scoping review

Yanyan Wang, Wanhe Li

Frontiers Psychology 2023



There is a life after the PhD

the truth from reddit, a scientifically(?) accurate website

- “For years I said I’d love a job where I got paid to learn, and not only is that true, but I get to increase the amount of knowledge in the world! It’s absolutely not for everyone, but it’s for me.”
- “Life is good. No regrets on doing the PhD as it's helped me to establish a niche in industry. I enjoy industry work much more.”
- “4 years out and I really like life. It was a bumpy start transitioning to the real world after so long in school. (...) Life is good on the other side. My only regret is how stressed out it made me for so many years at such a young age.”
- “Life after the PhD has been exponentially better for me (...)”

BACK TO BASICS : WHAT IS A PHD?

Learning by doing research — “Formation par la recherche”

...and *not* just producing scientific results.

After the PhD

RESEARCH (with or without teaching)

Academic positions in France (mostly)

Postdoc in France or abroad

Research positions in the private sector (R&D)

TEACHING (no research)

Capes NSI (high school — public sector)

Agrégation d'informatique (high school, "prepa", University, eng. school — public sector)

Enseignant·e / teacher (CDI or not) (private/public eng. schools)

OTHER (sorry no clear data, but observed from experience)

Public, academic (ingénieur·e de recherche)

Public, non-academic (e.g. Universities, ANR, public institutions, ...)

Startups (relevant with a PhD in CS/robotics — employee or initiator)

Consulting (computer science, ML)

After the PhD

RESEARCH (with or without teaching) ~70-75% — 3-year after PhD

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| | Taux d'insertion ¹ | | Taux d'emploi ² | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| | Femmes | Hommes | Femmes | Hommes |
| Sciences exactes et applications | 87,9 | 90,1 | 84,9 | 88,3 |
| Sciences du vivant | 85,9 | 90,8 | 81,0 | 87,9 |
| Sciences humaines et humanités | 87,8 | 88,5 | 83,8 | 82,1 |
| Sciences de la société | 90,0 | 91,1 | 84,0 | 84,8 |
| Toutes disciplines | 87,6 | 90,1 | 83,4 | 86,9 |

After the PhD defence: **89% employment after one year** (France)... ~92% after three years

Stable position* per topics (after one year):

51% in exact science and application

54% in human science

40% in life science

72 % have research positions — academic (49%) + private sector (23%)

Engineering and CS: ~40% academic, ~37% private sector

Humanities: 46% academic, 31% public sector (not acad.), ~8% private sector

Small shift from R&D (data from before Covid, though : 4 points from 2016 to 2018)

43% of PhDs come from outside France

60% work in France after 1 year

Compared to French PhDs, the balance is a bit tilted towards Industry (wrt academia)

*stable means: CDI, fonction publique titulaire, sometimes "indépendant installé durablement", but not CDD, postdoc, short contract, interims, etc.

[3] (most data from 2021, some few from 2018)

University / School

Master

Doctorat

France or abroad
Public or Private (Cifre) sectors



Temporary positions

(ATER, Postdoc — in France or abroad)

Permanent positions Public sector

Private sector, R&D

(in France or abroad)

Can be anything from working in a company, being self-employed, founding a company, working for a private school, ...

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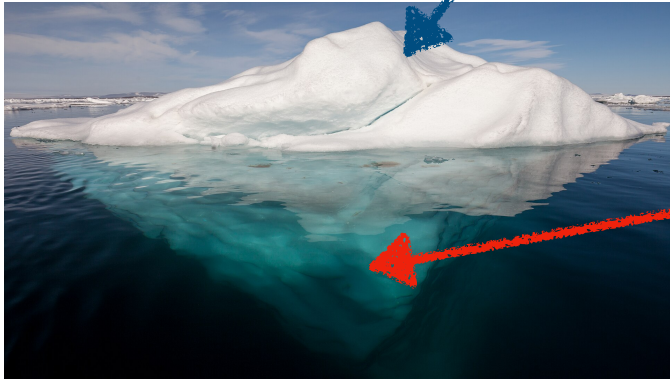


RESEARCH / TECHNICAL SKILLS

Depends on your topic, of course...but don't forget the **broader picture**: machine learning, computational modelling, medical robotics, <insert your domain>... in which **you already have 3+ years of experience.**

SOFT SKILLS

- **Autonomy**
- **Critical thinking**
- **Problem solving**
- **Resilience to failure**
- Reading and navigating the literature
- Summarising and writing research
- Presentation skills
- Working in teams



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Temporary positions, just after the PhD

Attaché Temporaire d'Enseignement et de Recherche (ATER) Specific to France

one-year temporary position — **teaching (192h*) and research position**

Teach at University, do research in a lab

Call for applications are published by each University, one-step process:

submit CV, possibly with letters of recommendation — end of Winter / early Spring

in practice: useful to finish your PhD or prepare the future... but heavy teaching load

Postdoctoral fellowships [8] Worldwide

Research position (worldwide), exact nature depends on the funding:

- **funded by an institution**, quite open (e.g. EU Postdoctoral Fellowships)
- **project-funded**, generally quite oriented (e.g. project-funded)

Ask around at conferences/workshops, summer/winter schools, meetings...

Duration varies, but **aim at a minimum of 18 months** (my personal opinion)

Mobility abroad is a very good move, if possible — choose your location wisely

MAÎTRE-SSE DE CONFÉRENCES (“MCF”)

University position, ~assistant/associate professor*

PROFILE

Public servant, attached to a University — **teaching and research position**

Teach at University, Do research in a lab (generally at the same university)

Teaching**: 192 hours per year (“équivalent TD”), or 128 hours if lectures only (“cours”)

APPLICATION [7]

A two-step process: (1) qualification (2) application

1. **qualification**

apply a document, valid for 4 years, teaching/research
usually during Autumn, dont miss the deadlines!

2. **application**

two calls:

synchronised, winter — “calendrier commun proposé chaque année”

anytime — “au fil de l’eau”

two steps:

application (PDF, submitted on “Galaxie”) — see next slides

audition (not automatic)

* “assistant/associate professor” in the US ; “lecturer” in the UK

** roughly: two 12-week semesters, 6-8 hours in front of the students per week

CHARGÉ·E DE RECHERCHE (“CR”) at CNRS

CNRS position, ~junior research

PROFILE

Public servant, attached to CNRS (research agency) — **research-only position**

Do research in a lab (generally on a university campus)

Teaching is possible

APPLICATION

Application — usually early January — see <https://emploi.cnrs.fr/>

Audition (not automatic) — usually Spring

PROCESS

National competition, jury are divided by “**CNRS sections**”

02, Sciences informatiques (INS2I) : (...) **informatique**, calculs, algorithmes, (...)

03, Sciences informatiques (INSIS) : (...) **robotique, interactions** (...)

see <https://www.cnrs.fr/comitenational/sections/intitsec.php>

Not just CNRS! There are other public research institutions with CR positions:

- **INRIA, INSERM, ONERA, CEA**, CNES, IFREMER, IRD, INRAE, ANSES, etc. — see websites for hiring
- CNRS is more individual-level research agenda, CEA/ONERA more team-level, INRIA is in-between, etc.

SOME ADVICES FOR PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

- **contact the people** you will be working with — entry points: team leader, lab director
 - why do you want to be there?
 - what will you bring to the lab?
 - propose to make a seminar, meet in person if possible
- write a **convincing research project**
 - 1-year horizon — what will you do on year one
Gives an idea of PhD profile you want to hire, project you will be submitting, etc.
 - 5-year horizon — what are you aiming at in the mid-term
Gives an idea of the team you will build around you, the kind of collaborations, etc.
 - infinite horizon — a vector for long-term
Provide an idea of the general direction
- ask for **letters of recommendation**, they should be *relevant* (PhD and postdoc advisors, senior researchers outside the lab if possible, teaching recommendations are welcome too)
- teaching positions: don't forget to **contact the teaching people** (needs from the teaching part may be very different from the research part)

Do not wait for the last minute ! Ask for feedback ! Polish all of your applications !

SOME ADVICES FOR ACING YOUR AUDITION

- General process
 - an **audition** is composed of (1) a **talk** in limited time and (2) **questions** from the jury
 - duration can be anything from 15 to 45 minutes, the jury is composed of 10-20 people
- during the **presentation time**
 - pre-check to avoid technical problems, respect time constraint exactly.
 - it is a very short interview, for a very long career. **Rehearsal is mandatory** — ask for help!
- during the **question time**
 - anyone from the jury might ask a question... BUT:
 - there are (generally) two jury members ("**the reviewers**") who have read your applications and will start questions. They are *generally* the closest to your research topic.
 - other members of the jury are mostly *non-specialists* on your topic. Some may be interested in teaching (for maitre·sse de conférences), or just be curious, etc.
- **a jury is composed of possibly very different people**, it is *not* a super-organism
 - your goal is to convince the largest number of jury members, not all of them !

After all candidates have been auditioned, the jury starts deliberating. It can be long, and full of surprises. Some things will depend on your profile and performance, some other things will depend on external contingencies (job profile, lab priorities, teaching requirements, etc.) that you cannot control.

Final words

Do not underestimate your **soft skills**

Apply to **training courses** through the doctorate school

Tutoring is part your advisor's duty, talk to him/her

Research is **not** the only option*

Later today (academic positions):

16:15 - 17:30 : Round table discussion “Sharing experiences with newly recruited staff”, with Azad Artinian, lecturer, Syrielle Montariol, CNRS research fellow, and Silvia Tulli, lecturer ;

* see slide #6 :
~25% of PhDs do something else.
Comments on this slide still apply!

[0] Resources for well-being during the PhD

Médecine préventive — near the Pyramid, Tower 55. Free, no appointment needed - contact: smp@sorbonne-universite.fr ; psychologue du travail : marion.martin@Sorbonne-universite.fr
ISIR, psychosocial risks: prevention@isir.upmc.fr
<https://sciences.sorbonne-universite.fr/vie-de-campus/accueil-vie-pratique/sante> — <https://santetudiant.com/>

[1] Que faire avec un doctorat en informatique

<https://www.socinfo.fr/journee-du-doctorat/>

[2] Ten simple rules to land a job after a phd

<https://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1007723>

[3] le devenir des docteurs après l'obtention de leur thèse

https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/FR/EESR18_R_40/le_devenir_des_docteurs_un_an_apres_l_obtention_de_leur_these/
https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/FR/EESR17_R_39/le_devenir_des_docteurs_trois_ans_apres_l_obtention_de_leur_these/

[4] r/phd on REDDIT : “Life after phd?”

https://www.reddit.com/r/PhD/comments/157n7nk/life_after_phd/?show=original

[5] “la valorisation du doctorat, un levier pour l'avenir” (2016, 2017)

<https://www.letudiant.fr/educpros/opinions/quoi-de-neuf-docteur-la-valorisation-du-doctorat-un-levier-pour-l-avenir.html>
<https://theconversation.com/un-an-apres-quoi-de-neuf-docteur-la-valorisation-du-doctorat-un-levier-pour-l-avenir-55785>

[6] Après le doctorat (sur le site du labo LMP)

https://www.obs.univ-bpclermont.fr/atmos/fr/enseignement/futur_etudiant/apres_these.php

[7] Maître·sse de Conférences / Assistant Professor

<https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/fr/qualification>
<https://cnu27.ls2n.fr/qualification/> — for Section 27 “computer science” (dedicated website for each domain)
https://www.galaxie.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/ensup/cand_recrutement.htm
https://www.galaxie.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/ensup/cand_recrutement_enseignants_chercheurs_Odyssee.htm

[8] Postdoctoral fellowship

<https://marie-skłodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/actions/postdoctoral-fellowships>
<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs>
<https://www.abg.asso.fr/en/candidatOffres>
Mailing lists with call for postdoc (example)
<https://www.lists.kit.edu/sympa/info/robotics-worldwide>
<https://www.gdr-robotique.org/offres-emploi/> (or ask your supervisor for relevant mailing lists)
Check also the research institutions. They generally have a postdoc positions directory, <https://emploi.cnrs.fr/> — <https://jobs.inria.fr/public/classic/fr/offres> — etc.

[9] How to make the leap into industry after a PhD

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02558-w>

A few pointers

Additional information (added 27/05/2026)

EN COMPLÉMENT DE LA PRESENTATION :

Sur les candidatures aux fonctions d'enseignant-chercheur·ses et chercheur·ses

Modèles de CV (plutôt orienté maître·sse de conférences)

- https://conseil-national-des-universites.fr/data/document/3486/2513/Public/Qualification/Section%2004_mod%C3%A8le%20CV%20PR.docx

- https://www.parisnanterre.fr/medias/fichier/trame_pour_construire_un_cv_universitaire_1327419870918.pdf

N'hésitez pas à demander autour de vous pour récupérer des CVs (en particulier auprès des jeunes recruté·es)

Sur le handicap

Message d'un collègue participant au jury CNRS de la section 8:

„

Les voies de recrutement handicap existent ! Trop peu de candidatures, pour deux raisons principales:

Manque d'information. Ceci inclut le fait que beaucoup de personnes ne savent même pas qu'elles peuvent avoir accès à la RQTH (le document administratif qui donne accès à ces voies de recrutement), et comme 80% des handicaps sont invisibles ou cachés les encadrants/collègues/DU ne peuvent pas toujours informer (quand ils sont en mesure de le faire). Réponse: ne pas hésiter à poser des questions aux référents handicap des sections CNRS, par exemple.

Auto-censure. Certaines personnes ne sont pas à l'aise avec leur handicap, avec le fait de parler de leur handicap, ou avec le fait d'"utiliser" leur handicap dans un cadre professionnel. Ces choix sont respectables, mais pas forcément bons "stratégiquement" pour le/la candidat(e), donc il faut bien que chaque personne en situation de handicap mûrisse sa réflexion.

Car les postes existent et la pression est généralement bien moindre (facteur 10 environ) que sur les postes "classiques", pour le même statut au final. C'est une manière juste de compenser les effets freinants des handicaps.

„

A lire aussi: <https://www.snesup.fr/publications/revues/vrs/vrs-ndeg443-octobre-novembre-decembre-2025-le-handicap-une-priorite-pour>