



MATTHEW CLARK

Industry: Public Sector / Local Government

CURRENT ROLE

- Air Quality Programme Manager, Local Authority

EDUCATION & CAREER PATH

- **BSc Biology**, University of York (3 years)
- Lab Technician (1 year)
- **PhD**, University of Leeds (6 months, discontinued)
- **MSc Environmental Health**, University of Derby (2 years)
- **Student Placement**, Environmental Health, Local Authority (1 year)
- **Local Authority Air Quality Lead** (Shropshire, 9 years)
- **PGDip Public Health**, University of Chester (2 years)
- **Local Authority Air Quality Programme Manager** (Hertfordshire, 3 years and ongoing)

HOW HIS PATH DIFFERED FROM EXPECTATIONS

- I never expected to end up in local government. After my BSc, I started a PhD but realized after six months that it wasn't the right fit—one of the hardest but best decisions I've made. Initially, I assumed local authority work would be rigid and process-driven, but I discovered environmental health offered constant learning opportunities. Now, 15 years later, I'm reconnecting with research, forging partnerships between academia and local authorities, and even stepping into a PhD co-supervisor role—something I never expected in this field.

CAREER INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

- I feel fulfilled in my role, especially because I still get to ask critical questions and challenge existing practices. Local authority work can be frustrating, but it's also incredibly rewarding. You work alongside dedicated people striving to improve local communities, and you can see your efforts translate into real, tangible actions.

FUTURE PLANS

- The local authority landscape is evolving, and I see major opportunities in interdisciplinary partnerships between academics and practitioners. My role has already allowed me to contribute to national discussions—speaking at the Environmental Audit Committee, attending parliamentary events, and advising on DEFRA's AQIS review. I plan to continue building networks and preparing for new opportunities as they emerge.

ADVICE FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS (ECRS)

- ☒ Don't be afraid to step away from something if it's not right for you—it's better to pivot than to stay on the wrong path.
- ☒ Diversify your experiences across academia, government, and industry—multiple perspectives make your insights more valuable.
- ☒ Build strong networks and connections—you never know what questions will arise or who you'll need to collaborate with in the future.