



# MOHAMED GHALAIENY

*Industry: Government*

## CURRENT ROLE

- Air Quality Scientist, Defra Air Quality Evidence Team

## EDUCATION & CAREER PATH

- **Freelance Journalism**, Free Speech Radio News + Palestine TV (2001–2004)
- **BSc Environmental Science**, The University of Manchester (2004–2007)
- **PhD Atmospheric Chemistry**, The University of Manchester (2007–2012)
- **Conflict and Environment Observatory** (2012–2014)
- **Career/Caring Break** + Healthcare Assistant (2014–2015)
- **Literary Translation**, Arabic-English (2014–present)
- **Research Data Analyst**, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School (2015–2016)
- **Postdoctoral Researcher**, Brunel University London (2017–2018)
- **Air Quality Scientist**, Defra (2018–present)
- **Career Break**, Cycling Instructor (2023–2024)

## HOW HIS PATH DIFFERED FROM EXPECTATIONS

- I never had a fixed career goal, just a two-step plan: gain interesting skills and find interesting work. There were low points—finishing my PhD left me disillusioned with academia, and struggles with mental health during my doctorate knocked my confidence. Still, those experiences taught me resilience and flexibility. When specialist roles weren't available, I leaned on broader skills like data analysis to keep progressing, which proved invaluable over time.

## CAREER INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

- Fulfilment comes from remembering why I'm here: to do impactful work at the interface of science, analysis, and government policy. Being part of a huge, complex organisation like Defra creates enormous opportunities to carve out your own niche within what can seem like a rigid system. Yes, there's bureaucracy, but it serves governance and accountability. I've been lucky to work alongside brilliant teams, and finding (or creating) a supportive environment is key to long-term satisfaction without becoming too siloed.

## FUTURE PLANS

- I'm happy at Defra—the supportive culture suits my life, and I still feel like I'm growing. I reflect often to make sure I'm not simply staying comfortable; as long as I continue to learn and challenge myself, I see no reason to move on.

## ADVICE FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS (ECRS)

- ☒ Experiment and collaborate: work with different people to discover what suits you.
- ☒ Don't always wait for permission: sometimes showing initiative builds a stronger case.
- ☒ Champion your work: learning to market yourself is crucial for progress.
- ☒ Don't despair: you have more control over your path than you think.
- ☒ Build a broad skillset: transferable skills open doors across sectors.
- ☒ Let go of perfection: realistic standards lead to better progress and less burnout.