



# MATT LOXHAM

*Industry: Academia*

## CURRENT ROLE

- Professorial Fellow

## EDUCATION & CAREER PATH

- **MBiochem, University of Oxford (2001)** – Left after one term
- **BSc in Pharmacology**, University of Sheffield (2002–2005)
- **Research Technician in Asthma Pharmacology**, University of Sheffield (2005–2006)
- **Career break** in NHS administrative work (2006–2009)
- **Integrated MRes/PhD** in Biomedical Science (Respiratory Biology), University of Southampton (2009–2013)
- **Postdoctoral Researcher** in pollution/allergen/virus effects on airways (2013–2016)
- **Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute** Research Fellow (2016–2017)
- **BBSRC Future Leader** Fellowship (now BBSRC Fellowship) (2017–2020)
- **NIHR Southampton Biomedical Centre** Senior Research Fellowship (2020–2021)
- **BBSRC David Phillips** Fellowship (2021–2026)

## HOW HIS PATH DIFFERED FROM EXPECTATIONS

- There was no set career plan, and much of the success in securing fellowships came down to luck and strong mentorship. A major surprise was the sheer volume of administrative work and emails that accompany seniority.
- The pressure to excel in all areas to stay competitive creates a treadmill effect, making it difficult to maintain balance. The decision to follow research interests rather than a strictly strategic approach may also pose challenges for future progression.

## CAREER INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

- Fulfillment in academia has fluctuated over time. The intellectual challenge—learning new things, developing ideas, and making discoveries that can ultimately benefit people—is incredibly rewarding. Working with dedicated colleagues, discussing science, and seeing new ideas succeed is an amazing experience, especially when mentoring others. The interdisciplinary nature of research keeps things fresh and engaging.
- However, over the years, the increasing burden of administration, funding pressures, and excessive reporting requirements have taken away from the core scientific work. Time for deep thinking and creativity has diminished, making a healthy work-life balance harder to maintain. The shift toward treating people as metrics on a spreadsheet rather than individuals has also been disheartening. In hindsight, the early years of Fellowship were the most fulfilling, when research was the main focus without excessive external pressures.

## FUTURE PLANS

- The future is uncertain. Increasing administrative pressures and decreasing engagement with core scientific work make staying in academia less appealing. However, the love for discovery and research remains strong, making the choice to leave a difficult one.

## ADVICE FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS (ECRS)

- ☒ Read, think, and discuss—science is more than just publishing.
- ☒ If you have a clear career goal, take the necessary steps—but remember, nothing is guaranteed.
- ☒ If unsure, focus on what you enjoy to make the most of your time.
- ☒ Keep an eye on alternative paths and maintain connections in other fields.
- ☒ Beyond research itself, the work environment and colleagues matter most.
- ☒ Get some decent mentors. Not just one, but a few, different ones, who can offer advice and support in different aspects of your career, as appropriate to your needs.