



SARAH MOLLER

Industry: Academia

CURRENT ROLE

- Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Atmospheric Science (NCAS), University of York

EDUCATION & CAREER PATH

- **MChem, 4 years**
- **PhD in Atmospheric Chemistry Measurement**, University of York, 4 years
- **Postdoc (York)**, overlapping with PhD write-up, 2 years
- **Education & Development Manager**, NCAS (Leeds), 1 year
- **NCAS liaison** with Defra (50% FTE) & Postdoc (York & Defra), 3 years
- **NERC Knowledge Exchange Fellow** (two consecutive fellowships) & Research Fellow (York & Defra), 9 years
- Air Pollution Theme Leader for NCAS
- **Seconded to Defra** as a Senior Research Fellow (2 years)
- **Promoted to Senior Research Fellow** (York, NCAS) in 2020 after maternity leave
- **Since 2024, Senior Research Fellow**, NCAS at York

HOW HER PATH DIFFERED FROM EXPECTATIONS

- I never had a structured career plan—initially, I saw postdoctoral work as temporary while I figured out my next steps. I considered a transition into science communication but realized I could fulfill that passion within a research role.
- My initial collaboration with Defra turned into a long-term opportunity that shaped my independent research career in ways I never anticipated. Encouragement from colleagues and unexpected opportunities played a huge role in shaping my path, reinforcing the importance of staying open to new directions.

CAREER INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

- I feel fulfilled in my role, even though I frequently feel overworked—it's a trade-off I accept because I genuinely enjoy my work. My inability to say no often stems from my passion for engaging with brilliant colleagues, tackling meaningful projects, and influencing policy with research.
- What I find most rewarding is the opportunity to discuss ideas, explore new questions, and connect research to real-world impact. Whether it's delivering evidence to policymakers or shaping atmospheric science discussions, I thrive on these interactions and collaborations.

FUTURE PLANS

I plan to stay in my current role for as long as I can secure funding. I love the freedom to pursue research that interests me, the flexibility to collaborate, and the conversations that spark new ideas and opportunities. As long as I can keep shaping my own path and making an impact, I'm happy to stay.

ADVICE FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS (ECRS)

- ☒ Luck plays a role in career progression, but you can create your own luck by embracing opportunities and staying open to new connections.
- ☒ Approach every project and interaction with curiosity—you never know where it might lead.
- ☒ Engage with people outside your immediate field; collaborations and conversations can open unexpected doors.
- ☒ Stay flexible and don't worry if you don't have a clear career plan—many paths unfold through experience rather than careful design.