

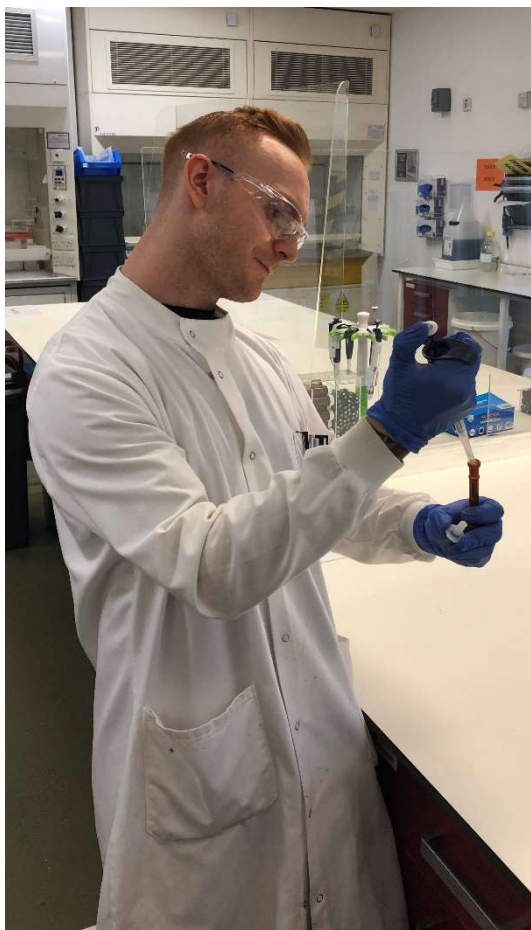
Michael Brown

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Michael was determined to pursue a career in chemistry despite not previously studying the subject at school.

What challenges have you faced to get to where you are now?

I struggled a lot halfway through high school with mental health issues, which was making learning difficult due to lacking energy most days. However, I managed to overcome this with support from friends, and a lucky realisation of my own poor mental health.



During my master's degree in chemistry, I found it difficult to learn most of the concepts from scratch, whilst others were ahead with prior knowledge, as I was catching up on things since my undergraduate degree was in Biomedical Science. So I had to spend extra hours outside of university learning, as well as working near full-time hours as part of the degree. But, I did it in the end. **Why did you decide on a career in science?**

I performed well in subjects like Maths, Physics and Biology at school and was recognised for being able to connect information like a jigsaw puzzle, so I felt it was a good idea to focus on these strengths for a career. The key moment was at university doing my honours project when I witnessed the discovery of a treatment that I tested on a microorganism caused it to change shape and multiply differently – this informed our understanding of how to treat infectious diseases. Being able to be a part of a scientific discovery that had a potential medical purpose was what sold it for me. I also love helping others and knowing I could help people live healthier lives or assist them with an illness or condition through solving problems.

When did you decide on a career in science?

I wasn't sure exactly what area of science to focus on, so wanted to see where things took me. Honestly, during my initial few years as an undergraduate Biomedical Science student I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Towards the end of my BSc Honours year, I realised I wanted to do medical research of some kind but

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had trouble picking a specific area, which made my initial plan of beginning PhD study troublesome. I achieved some experience in project work for my honours project doing microbiology-based work investigating prebiotics, in partnership with a company, which provided me with many of the basic lab skills I have today. This project was expanded after I graduated and I worked for the company to do further antibiotic testing in conjunction with the prebiotic I was working with. I also gained experience working with synthetic reactions where most of the work involved colourful experiences involving messy lab coats!



Do you work mostly on your own or as part of team?

Much of the work is generally performed on your own, although there are times during busy analyses that require help from a colleague. Also, many of the standards that we work to require a second “verifier” to sign off on our work, so there is a team aspect there to support us. I’m also based within the health and safety project teams that focus on improving health and safety within the entire site. This involves regular meetings to access progress and updates for peoples’ creative suggestions and for raising hot topics when appropriate.

What is it like socially where you work?



The workplace is nice, with many interesting people from different backgrounds who are all very helpful and supportive. My department also have a “Party Patrol” group that organised events in and out of work like scavenger hunts, bowling events, road trips etc.

What one piece of advice would you give to someone seeking a career in chemistry?

Even if you feel like you might not like it or find it interesting, it’s always worth trying to get experience that could grow into an interest you wouldn’t expect. I never would have thought my human biology interest would lead to an immunology interest involving microbiology, then an interest in antibiotics to synthetic chemistry, only to end in analytical chemistry. Life takes us to unexpected places when we’re open to experiences!