

ChemDiverse Career Profile Questions

Iain McLellan

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Iain is a LGBTQIA+ man with a degree in geology and chemistry. He faced challenges growing up in Scotland as a gay man, and how this environment led him to believe he would not be able to pursue a career in the sciences.



Why did you decide on a career in science?

Growing up I always enjoyed reading science books and I collected a fortnightly magazine called "Tree of Knowledge" which was a great introduction to science topics. When I was deciding to do with my life when working in Safeway, a science degree was the obvious choice. (2001)



What qualifications and experience do you have?

- First Class Honours degree in Earth Sciences and Chemistry,
- PhD in environmental chemistry
- PG Cert in teaching and learning in Higher Education.
- worked for a UK Charity as a Policy Officer looking at air quality, land quality and noise pollution.
- After my PhD I worked for SEPA and then returned to charity work before moving into academia in 2015.

What does your typical day involve?

On a daily basis what I do can vary from giving lectures and leading workshops to chemistry and forensic students doing their undergraduate degree, giving lectures to the MSc students and supervising their dissertation projects to doing research- It's the variety in my job that keeps in interesting!

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

To make the degree a success, or to get publishable research its best to work with a team of colleagues who bring their own expertise and knowledge. Without the support of a team, I would not be where I am.

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

I grew up in a poor part of the country so one of the biggest challenges was telling myself that I was capable of pursuing a career in science.



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Also, peoples' opinions (certainly where I grew up) meant that there was nobody openly gay at school. There were also no gay science role models and I never thought it would be a career that I would be welcomed in.

Fortunately, since leaving school, I have never faced homophobia in any of the jobs I have had and for that I am extremely grateful.

How has your career developed since you started working?

Since I got my BSc (Hons) degree I have had 4 different jobs – Policy Officer, Scientist, Policy and Development Officer and now University Lecturer.



What are you most proud of in your career?

Watching students graduate and seeing them go off into the world is always a proud moment.

What possibilities are there for your career in the future?

You can become a Professor if you're focussing on research, or go into leadership roles.

What do you think are the most important skills for someone in your role to have?

The 'soft skills' would be resilience, the ability to listen to others and accept their expertise, presentation skills, tenacity, and perseverance. The 'technical skills' would be understanding of theory, understanding of analytical equipment, and research publications.

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

If you're a student then join the Royal Society of Chemistry and start to build your knowledge and contacts. My main advice for job hunting is never to go up. If you're in a job and wanting to make a change, then trust your gut instincts as they are usually right.