

ChemDiverse Career Profile

Christine Davidson

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Christine is a woman in STEM with a senior role in academia. She was the first female lecturer appointed in the Department of Pure and Applied Chemistry

When did you decide on a career in science?

I was fascinated by science from a very early age. So I think science was just something that I always expected to be involved in, in some shape or form. My initial thought was to become a school science teacher, but my career path took me on a different route (though still with the education aspect, which I really enjoy)

What qualifications and experience do you have?

BSc (Hons) 1st Class, Chemistry, University of Glasgow
PhD, Department of Physics and Astronomy/Department of Chemistry, University of Glasgow
Postdoctoral researcher, Department of Nuclear Physics, University of Utrecht, Netherlands
Postdoctoral researcher, Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre, UK

What does your typical day involve?

It's very varied, but typically starts with some time spent answering emails and dealing with any urgent issues. During the semester I'm likely to have teaching – lectures to deliver or practical laboratory classes to look after. The summer months are more geared towards research, where I might get involved in the collection of environmental samples for analysis, write scientific papers for publication in learned journals, and attend scientific conferences to present the results of our research to a wider audience.



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

I do spend a lot of time on the computer working alone but am also part of various teams, groups and committees that focus on different things. Most important of these is my research group of international PhD students. Working with scientists from around the globe is a huge privilege and a real highlight of my job.

I also chair the Department's PGR Operations Group (the staff-student liaison committee for PhD and MPhil students) and sit on our Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.

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What is it like socially where you work?

It's very collegiate. People are friendly and willing to help one another. We always have a great Christmas Party, and make sure to give anyone who retires a good send off.

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

I was the first female lecturer appointed to the Department of Pure and Applied Chemistry and had to work extremely hard to be recognised. I can't count the number of times I've been mistaken for my own secretary! A more insidious challenge is the fact that women in academia disproportionately deal with pastoral care and academic administration issues, making it harder to build a research career.



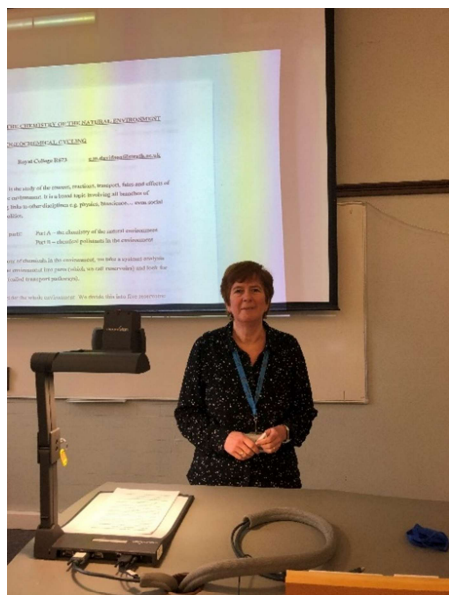
How has your career developed since you started working?

I have much more responsibility and autonomy. As a junior academic I contributed to lecture courses and looked after PhD students jointly with others. As senior lecturer, I was designing and delivering courses, supervising my own independent research group in Analytical Geochemistry and becoming more involved with the running of the department. Now I am responsible for the department's cohort of over 160 PhD and MPhil students, supported by two members of administration staff. I'm also involved in various knowledge transfer partnerships with industry; I've been an independent science advisor to local government; and I've chaired the Royal Society of Chemistry Analytical Division Scottish Region.

What are you most proud of in your career?

It would have to be something to do with postgraduate research – either helping to develop Strathclyde's unique Postgraduate Certificate in Researcher Professional Development, or just the incredible PhD graduates that come through our research group.

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



First, the knowledge-based skills – expertise in analytical and environmental science and understanding how these topics relate to major issues of the day such as achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Then the wider skills such as being organised, innovative, good at solving problems, and able to communicate clearly and listen to others.

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

Choose a career based on what interests you/you feel passionate about and be prepared to work hard and deal with the challenges that will inevitably arise along the way.