



Name: Sarah-Jane Lonsdale

Current Job: Principal's Career Development Scholar (PhD Student)

Scientific Discipline/Field: Nuclear Physics

University: University of Edinburgh

Country: United Kingdom

Pick some letters (L,G,B,T,Q,+, etc.): B/P

Website: <http://nuclearsarah.wordpress.com>

Twitter or other social media handle (if applicable)? [@NuclearSarah](https://twitter.com/NuclearSarah)

What does your job involve?

I study Nuclear Astrophysics – the origin of the chemical elements inside stars. My research is in experimental nuclear physics, so I perform experiments to simulate the nuclear reactions that occur in these environments in the laboratory. This means I get to travel a great deal to perform my research at international facilities, like CERN.

How did you get to this job (education etc.)?

During my GCSEs, I was able to secure some work experience at the National Physical Laboratory, through a mentoring programme at my school. I had always been interested in how things worked, and this gave me the opportunity to see what it was like to work in scientific research.

I studied Mathematics, Physics, Geography and Further Mathematics at A-Level, and also did an AS-Level in German. It's important to study Physics and Mathematics at A-level to apply for undergraduate degrees in Physics and Engineering, to have a good technical understanding.

After I took part in the Year in Industry scheme, I took up a place to study for an MPhys in Physics at the University of Surrey. I really enjoyed my experience there, and the opportunity to perform my Masters research in Tennessee, USA. The experience gained while abroad helped me to get my PhD position at the University of Edinburgh.

Do you feel being LGBT has affected your career decisions?

Sometimes. I definitely had to think carefully before deciding to take up my placement in Tennessee, as I was unsure how tolerant the community would be. It was fine in the end, and my colleagues in America were very supportive, but I know attitudes can vary. I try to be cautious around new colleagues from different backgrounds, as I am aware that other societies have very different views on LGBTQ+ people. To pursue an academic career, it's quite common to move internationally to broaden your expertise, and this can be difficult for LGBTQ+ people. As I'm in my third year of my PhD, that's something I'm starting to become more concerned about, as I think about my next steps.

Have you had any reactions from colleagues about being LGBT, either good or bad?

I've generally had a very good experience of being 'out' in science. The university sector in the UK is very welcoming, and I've had no problems with colleagues that I've collaborated with so far in my academic work. People tend to be intrigued, and might ask a bit about my partner to begin with, but other than that it's business as usual!

I'm aware of other LGBTQ+ colleagues in the UK that have had difficulties as a result of their gender expression/sexuality, but these incidents were dealt with swiftly and appropriately by their departments.

Did you have any role models growing up (LGBT, STEM, totally unrelated...)?

On the LGBT side, I had a bit of an obsession with Brian Molko (lead singer of Placebo). He was openly bisexual and androgynous in the late nineties and early noughties, when a lot of mainstream musicians weren't. The band's sound and queer aesthetic really appealed to the outsider that I was as a teenager. I also felt similarly about David Bowie; he really was a man ahead of his time and his music is just phenomenal.

In terms of STEM, most of my role models have actually come from my own working experience. Aside from Marie Curie, I'm not sure that I was consciously aware of many female scientists while I was growing up, and the idea of pursuing science didn't seem very likely until I met women, like myself, who worked in STEM.

What are your plans for the future?

Aim for the stars!

I'm looking at my options at the moment and trying to decide whether I will pursue a position academia, or move into another role, perhaps in scientific computing or science communication. Whatever I choose, I plan to be proudly LGBTQ+ in STEM.