Sylvia Knight

I enjoyed meteorology (and all aspects of physical geography) a lot at school, as well as being strong at maths and physics. I was never really sure what I wanted to study but somewhere picked up the information that, if I wanted to end up being a meteorologist, it was probably best to do a physics degree. So, I decided to study Natural Sciences, where I could at least put off specialising until the last year of my degree. In the end, I took physics and geology in my second year, and physics in my third. With a good degree, it was relatively easy to get a funded place at Reading University's Meteorology Department to work towards a Ph.D.

My Ph.D. topic was very theoretical – looking at how very large waves in the atmosphere interact with weather system development. After that, I spent some time using computer models to explore how changes in stratospheric ozone (associated with the growth and predicted recovery of the ozone hole) affect the climate at the Earth's surface. More recently, I worked with the climate*prediction*.net project (http://www.climateprediction.net). I was responsible for the communication side of a project which is wholly reliant on volunteers around the world donating computer time – so I had to make sure that people heard about the project, and then had the opportunity to learn about the project and what the computer models are telling us about the Earth's climate. Part of this involved working with teachers to develop resources for schools.

I now work for the Royal Meteorological Society, and am responsible for their education activities – from primary schools right through to continuing professional development for Chartered Meteorologists.

I was lucky enough to take part on a student field trip, sailing in the Solent. It was the most 'hands on' meteorology I have done, and I particularly enjoyed listening to the shipping forecast and working out what that meant the weather map looked like over the British Isles.
I also, for a brief period of time, helped a colleague who was supporting an attempt on the world altitude record for a manned balloon http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/cornwall/3078074.stm
The balloonists needed to know exactly where their balloon would land – it had to be over water, and it had to be within range of the ship that would rescue them, and so needed custom-made forecasts for the trajectory of the balloon.
In 2005 I visited several countries, including Lithuania, Kazakhstan and Russia, to talk about predicting the climate on behalf of the British Council. That was extremely interesting!

Qualifications

Ph.D. in Meteorology from the University of Reading
M.A. in Natural Sciences from the University of Cambridge
A levels in Maths, Physics, Geography and German
Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society