

## CASE STUDIES



# Dr Sibylle Heidelberger

## Support Specialist



### What did you study at university?

I was always interested in sciences and wasn't sure which way I wanted to go so I chose biochemistry, which was a nice mixture of chemistry in a biological context. My undergraduate degree was Biochemistry Co-op (BSc), a co-operative education programme meaning I went to work as part of my degree. I worked at Astra Zeneca and a few other places which helped me decide what direction I wanted to go in.

### What did you do after university?

My final year project, where I studied enzyme inhibitors known as Eglin c binding loops, was so interesting that I continued to work for the same professor for my Master's degree, where I became involved in mass spectrometry. I loved working with the mass spectrometers and I wanted to focus on that type of research and work. This led to me doing a part-time PhD while working full-time as a mass spectrometry technician at the School of Pharmacy, University of London. Whilst doing post-doctoral research in Seattle, Washington, I realised that I liked using the instruments, training people and working with them. I decided to try my hand in industry, working for a mass spectrometer company.

### What are the main duties of your role?

I support customers who have bought our instruments and help them to achieve their goals. This can involve helping with instrument setup, troubleshooting and user training. I also support sales at the company and work on demonstrations where potential customers give us samples to analyse. I give lectures at universities, give short courses for training and present at conferences.

### What skills are needed, other than scientific knowledge, to do the job?

In this role, both verbal and written communication skills are very important. In addition, an analytical mind for troubleshooting is a key part of the job, along with the ability to multi-task and stay organized.

### What aspects of your job do you enjoy most?

I like working with and meeting people, whether it is at conferences or in the lab for a demonstration. I love my work; talking about it, working with the instruments and on difficult data sets.

### What aspects of your job do you enjoy least?

A downside of the role is that there is a lot of travelling. There are some months where I am hardly at home, as I am travelling from one place to another; it can be exhausting.

### What are the potential next steps from your current role?

From this point, I can move towards a managerial role or a technical marketing role, doing research and developing new methodology on the instrument. From here it would be possible to become a mass spectrometry lab manager either in industry or academia.

### Do you have any advice for someone wishing to enter your career area?

If you're interested in this type of work or any sort of analytical work, I suggest you try to work or volunteer in a lab, either at the university or in an analytical lab. The key is to be interested in what you are doing as your interest and enthusiasm will work for you.

### What is biochemistry?

Biochemistry is the branch of science that explores the chemical processes that take place inside all living things, from bacteria to plants and animals. It is a laboratory-based science that brings together biology and chemistry, by using chemical knowledge and techniques to help understand and solve biological problems.

**Mass spectrometry:** a way to identify the chemicals within a sample, and the relative amounts of each chemical.

### Further information

#### Career ideas (Prospects):

[www.prospects.ac.uk/options\\_biology.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_biology.htm)

#### Biochemistry careers information:

[www.biochemistry.org/Education/Highereducation.aspx](http://www.biochemistry.org/Education/Highereducation.aspx)

#### General science careers information:

[www.futuremorph.org/](http://www.futuremorph.org/)

**For more information visit [www.biochemistry.org](http://www.biochemistry.org)**