

.....

# Vanessa Pilley

## Senior Scientific Officer

.....

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Senior Scientific Officer

**Organisation:** Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

**Location:** London, UK

### How did you get to where you are now?

I have worked in the public sector since 2009, after graduating with an MSc in Disaster Management, and a BSc in Geology & Geography. I started on the Ministry of Defence's Science & Engineering Graduate Scheme, as an Environmental & Sustainability Officer, working mainly on nuclear defence projects. I then moved to Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), as a Geography Evidence Adviser, where I promoted and advised on the use of geography across the Defra Network and Whitehall. I also represented Defra on the Copernicus Expert User Group for Emergency & Disaster Management and on the International Disaster Charter. However, the majority of my role was managing the Met Office Hadley Centre Climate programme, co-funded with DECC, and engaging across Defra to promote climate science, especially in an adaptation context.

In 2016, I undertook a secondment to MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), as the UK Contact Point for the North-West Europe and North Sea Region Interreg Programmes and Programme Lead for URBACT. Interreg programmes fall under the EU Cohesion Policy and are funded by the European Regional Development Fund; the aim is to support cooperation across borders, through project funding, to jointly tackle common challenges and find shared solutions.

I have recently returned to Defra, as a Senior Scientific Officer, and am currently working on building

international science & innovation partnerships.

### Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

One thing that has always impressed potential employers when I apply for jobs is my commitment to CPD – both in support of my chartership, but also my evident interest in what I originally studied. Also, that I run a not-for-profit organisation, outside work, delivering hazard workshops to developing communities.

### What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

Project management and communication skills.

### How does geography feature in your work?

For a start, when building international partnerships. It is good to know where places are, but geography also helps one understand the natural environment and cultural aspects of a country!

### What do you enjoy most about your job?

I love working beyond borders. Seeing how countries can work together to share knowledge on common environmental challenges is extremely rewarding and something I am passionate about.

### What are the opportunities for career progression?

There is the option to apply for promotion within, and transfers between departments. There are also loans to various agencies.

### What advice would you give to someone wanting to go into this career?

Geography is a great degree base – you can become highly specialised or go into management – learn the basics!

### How do you maintain your knowledge and interest in geography outside of work?

I travel ... a lot. I also volunteer at Bristol zoo every week. I attend various courses held locally by scientific organisations and universities. This variety keeps things interesting, but also makes sure I'm up to date on new thinking!

### Why did you choose geography?

Because I genuinely loved, and still do, trying to understand the planet we live on, how it impacts us, and how we impact that! implemented on our lives. If you do not see someone who looks like you or a variety of people, it may be even more crucial that you study geography to enable yourself to become a

**W:** [www.rgs.org/iamageographer](http://www.rgs.org/iamageographer)



leader in research and policy. Without all sections of society involved in polar research, we will not be able to develop fully robust plans to adapt to climate change.