

Dr Craig Poku

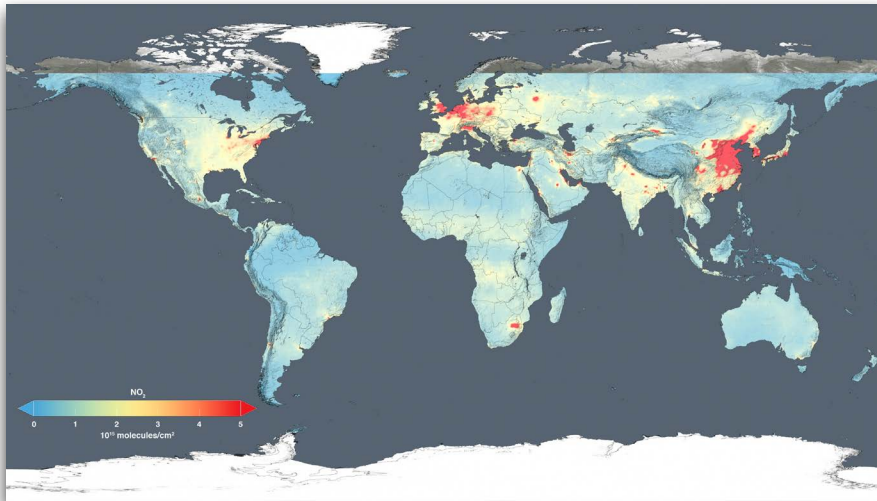
Dr Craig Poku is a scientist who grew up in London. After school he went to study Mathematics at university, graduating with first class honours. He then tried doing a master's degree in maths, but didn't enjoy it – so he dropped out. Later he went to study a PhD at the University of Leeds, but in a field a little bit different: atmospheric sciences. Now he works at the University of York and his research is all about air quality in towns and cities across the UK.

Craig is a great example of how studying science is interdisciplinary – in other words, how scientists combine lots of different fields of knowledge, such as maths, climate science, and chemistry. He also experienced something that happens to a lot of scientists: making a decision, realising it might not be right for you, and then making a new decision that suits you better. Working out what you don't really enjoy can help you on your way to discovering what you do enjoy!



Image credit: Black in Geoscience

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[Young STEM Leader VIP interview](#)



Caption: This map shows how much nitrogen dioxide, an air pollutant, was in the lowest level of the atmosphere in 2014. You can see that there is a lot in the air around London.

Image credit: NASA

His current work on urban air quality was inspired in part by growing up in London, where there are a lot of fumes in the air as it is a busy city, and also by an interest in environmental injustice: many marginalised communities live in areas of higher pollution, whereas communities who produce more emissions and higher levels of pollution tend to live in cleaner, more "desirable" areas. The work he does on air quality therefore not only uses lots of different scientific skills, but it has a real-life impact on people living in towns and cities across the UK.

Craig previously co-lead a project called [Black in Geoscience Week](#) which involved discussions on how there is poor representation of black scientists in earth and planetary scientists, as well as the barriers that black scientists face in STEM fields. He is only the third person identifying as Black British to graduate with a PhD in environmental sciences from the University of Leeds! The tireless work of scientists like Craig will hopefully lead to more barriers being broken down and fair representation being built up, and contributions of black scientists being more widely recognised.

