



Alumna Subject Graduated Place of Work Position

Kate Martyn
European Studies
2002
Merton Council
Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships



Merton Council is responsible for over 210,000 residents in south west London, providing a variety of services and support including education, housing, social services, local planning and arts & leisure services. Kate has worked for the Borough as Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships since 2010 and leads on policy development for the council, strengthening relationships with the local voluntary and community sector, and working with organisations such as the police, NHS, housing associations and voluntary groups.

Were you considering any other universities before joining RHBNC?

I originally wanted to go to St Andrews to study international relations, but during my UCAS application process, they cancelled the course as the course Director was leaving. As it turns out, the course director Dr Joanne Wright was coming to Royal Holloway, so I withdrew from that application year, took my gap year as planned and then reapplied. In addition to the course, I chose Royal Holloway because it was part of the University of London, but not in central London (which I didn't fancy at the time), and I liked the facilities on offer and the atmosphere I got when I visited ... and, of course, the beautiful setting.

Were you involved in any societies while you were at the College?

I was one of the founder members of the European Society. We organised a trip around Europe to Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Brussels to take in the key EU institutions. We also got some interesting speakers to College through the European Commission office in London and Britain in Europe.

What did you enjoy most about your course?

The multi-disciplinary nature of it – it took in history, politics, EU history and politics, and French. I gained a rounded knowledge base for all my subjects and fluency in French, in addition to the

strong transferrable skills (structuring an argument, written skills, workload management, presentation skills, etc.) that studying for a degree gives you. I really enjoyed working with students who were studying French in different combinations too, like Drama and French, as you got a different perspective from them. I also feel that I got more out of my French studies because of my interaction with the other elements of the course.

What is the most important thing that Royal Holloway has taught you?

To seek out and – more importantly – make your own opportunities. You come to university to work hard and get a degree but you still need to make the opportunities to do something with that degree. I also gained a lot of confidence and learnt to share my opinions and be unashamed of them.

What has been your career path since leaving Royal Holloway?

As my course included honours level French I had a year abroad. I chose to do my year in Brussels and arranged a year-long internship at the European Parliament working for Glenys Kinnock MEP, undertaking research and managing her diary. I followed this with a three-month internship at an EU Affairs agency, which involved carrying out research to support clients' interests and developing lobbying strategies. I graduated in 2002 and was

keen to work in a political environment developing policy. I came across a position of 'Scrutiny Officer' at Maidstone Borough Council in Kent that looked interesting. Overview and scrutiny involves elected local politicians influencing how policy is developed, and holding council and other statutory decision makers to account. Scrutiny Officers provide research and policy development support to the scrutiny politicians. In 2004 I was promoted to Scrutiny Manager to manage the service, and got more involved in wider council-wide projects.

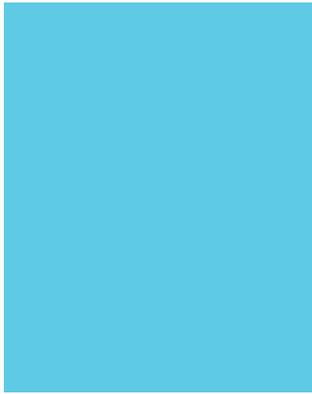
Why did you join Merton Council?

I was looking to progress in my career and so in 2005 I moved to Merton Council, an outer London unitary council, as Scrutiny Manager to reform their scrutiny function to support the development of their good governance arrangements. I worked with councillors and senior managers to review the service, iron out problem areas and introduce best practice, including greater involvement of local people in challenging the way local public services are run. I am really proud of this work, which put in place a strong system that was valued by the councillors, and recognised nationally as best practice. In 2009/10 an independent evaluation carried out by Professor Steve Leach of De Montfort University, found the Merton scrutiny function to be "among the best in the country". I became Head of Stronger Communities in 2008 which

Great minds go on to great places



Royal Holloway
University of London



people with passion

“A LOT has changed around campus – new halls, new lecture theatres, and new sports facilities. I’m a bit jealous that I’m not there now!”



added responsibility for leading on the community cohesion, equalities and community engagement agendas to my portfolio. In 2010 I was appointed as Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, which means I lead on policy development, our work with the local voluntary and community sector, working in partnership with organisations such as the police, NHS, housing associations, fire, business plus, and policy on community cohesion and equalities.

What inspired you to become involved in local government?

I loved working at the European Parliament but wanted to work more at a local level where I could see the impact of what I did. Working in local government offers the potential to make a real and lasting impact on the lives of local people – some of those I talk to on the phone or by email I also bump into in the street. I think local government has an old fashioned reputation for being dull, with most people’s knowledge of what local authorities do being limited to knowing who collects their bins. However, the range of policy areas you can work on is vast, from where people live and what type of housing they live in, how they get to and from work, their choices for educating their children, how vulnerable people are supported to live their lives, etc. Councils have always had to be innovative to ensure that the public money that funds their work goes as far as it can. The

financial crisis has meant that professionals in local government have had to draw on these skills more and more. It’s a privilege to be part of responding to these huge challenges.

What do you enjoy most about working for Merton Council?

There is a lot going on! I could be talking to the Police or Fire Service about potential projects we can work on in partnership or a member of the public about something they are worried about that is happening in their street. I really like working with councillors as well. There are a lot of dedicated people from across a range of organisations (the council, police, fire, health, voluntary sector, business, housing, job centre, colleges, etc) coming up with innovative ideas to work together to tackle some of the big issues in the Borough (unemployment, health improvement, increase educational attainment, business growth). It’s very inspirational.

What exciting projects are you working on at the moment?

I am about to lead a project to work with local people and partners to identify Merton’s local priorities for the next ten years. We’ll be looking at the longer term vision for the Borough and making sure it is locally driven. As our resources dwindle we have to make really tough decisions about what services we can deliver and in what way. These decisions need to reflect what local people want and need. We also

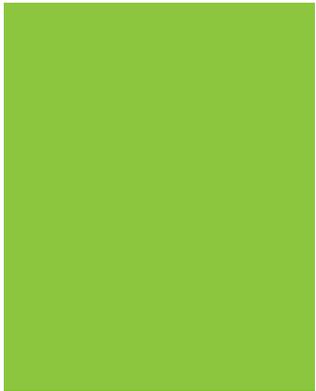
want to increase volunteering in Merton, particularly as a means of supporting people back into work. I’m also organising a national conference in the autumn to showcase innovation in Merton as a result of partnership working.

What advice would you give to students interested in a career in local government?

Consider approaching local authorities for work experience and/ or look at the National Graduate Development Programme – a two year contract during which you study and work at a local council. Merton takes two NGDP trainees every two years and a number of the trainees have had placements in my team over the years. It’s a great scheme that I wasn’t aware of when I graduated. There are also lots of opportunities for you to build your CV while you’re a student and this is increasingly important in this jobs market. I was involved in RAG and the European Society while I was at College and I didn’t realise that at the same time I was developing skills and improving my employability.

Have you been back to the College since graduating?

My best friend and I met on the first day of Freshers’ Week as we were next door neighbours in Reid Hall. We came back to visit campus on our ten year anniversary – as luck would have it it was also the beginning of Freshers’ Week and we had a chance to wander down memory lane among wide-eyed new students taking it all in.



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