

# Expanding the boundaries of professional knowledge at Roffey Park

Hilary Oakley

An MSc has the potential to stretch your abilities and enhance your approach to people and organisation development, argues Hilary Oakley, Head of Learning and Development at Cancer Research UK.

Hilary Oakley has been a HR professional for many years and has always been keen to explore the field in a more academically rigorous fashion. For that reason, she was interested in taking a recognised Masters that would enhance her skills and her approach to work.

"I had wanted to extend my professional knowledge by undertaking a Masters degree for some time," explains Hilary. "The opportunity to explore the field of OD beyond the pragmatic day to day learning you get on the job was extremely attractive to me. For that reason I began researching the various organisations and institutes that offer appropriate degrees."

Despite her research, there were few courses that sparked Hilary's interest. However, she had heard good reports about Roffey Park from various sources: "I had never been to Roffey Park but it had a great reputation among my colleagues plus I happened to meet a Roffey Park consultant on another course who gave me a balanced and objective account of the Roffey Park approach. It was this that convinced me that Roffey Park could provide the ideal MSc for me."

"I found Roffey Park's approach really interesting. It is different in that it has academic rigour without the confining, restrictive structure found on so many other courses, and your learning goes much further and deeper than the purely theoretical" continues Hilary. "However, I was also probably naive about what this would mean in practice. It's difficult to understand the process before you're immersed in it and it entailed a lot of hard work and commitment."

The MSc in People and Organisational Development runs for two years and is made up of five three or four-day residential sessions, combined with twenty one-day learning set sessions. The first residential course consists of the course induction, learning set formation, starting to map the field of people and organisational development and an introduction to critical thinking. Subsequent residential components explore the course material in more detail. This is complemented by the learning sets, in which a group of five to six peers, supported by a Roffey Park set adviser, meet – either at Roffey Park or their own workplaces – and critique each others papers.

"The course offered much more than I anticipated which was fantastic. It introduced me to self-managed learning and developed my critical thinking ability which are incredibly valuable tools that prove useful even after completing the course. The degree itself works on several levels – combining academic knowledge with a deeper understanding of who you are and what is important to you. It also builds strong relationships with your peers in the learning sets; even now, two years after completing the Masters, we still meet up and continue use the learning set environment to further our learning."



Another factor that made Roffey Park unique in Hilary's eyes is the environment: "There is no doubt that Roffey Park as a venue is ideal as it creates a space to think and learn away from the pressures of daily office life. The Learning Resource Centre is invaluable, the resources and staff are great in providing support to you while you study.

Having completed her journey, Hilary has seen it make a positive impact on her working practices and has even encouraged her to pursue her ideal career: "The MSc has become central to my work and what I do. My time at Roffey Park gave me the space to think about the type of company I want to work for and, as a result, I changed jobs shortly after completing it. I now work for an organisation that truly values people and their development and that has made a huge difference to me both professionally and personally."

Roffey Park holds regular free open events where you can find out more about the MSc in People and Organisational Development. For more information:



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