

People in the News

Maja Maricevic



Lorraine Estelle joined Maja Maricevic in the lovely surrounding of the British Library to hear about her new role as Head of Higher Education there.

Maja had been in post as Head of Higher Education at the British Library for only four weeks – so it was early days! I started by asking Maja about the career route that led her to the British Library. She began her academic life at University College London where she read Slavonic Studies, before moving to the University of East Anglia for her second degree, this time in post-modern fiction. Her working life started in fundraising charity roles, mainly in the areas of arts and culture. This in turn led to a role in the late 1990s working with Young Enterprise, the United Kingdom's largest business and enterprise education charity, connecting industry with the education process. Maja was responsible for bringing Young Enterprise programmes to colleges and schools in West London. She had not only to find volunteers and organize events, but also had the unenviable task of raising the funds to pay for her own post. In this role she was involved in a graduate programme with Brunel University – her first involvement

with the higher education sector. It was a pioneering project to encourage development of practical enterprise skills among engineering students, and very rewarding.

This valuable experience led on to a role as Development Manager at Middlesex University, this time connecting the university with industry, and ensuring that the knowledge transfer agenda was thoroughly embedded in all academic groups. During her time at Middlesex University, Maja saw a huge change with the development of a large 'third stream' department producing a substantial income. In the UK, 'third stream' is the term for activity which seeks to create more engagement – or 'knowledge exchange' – between the knowledge and expertise at universities and colleges and the wider world. This includes enhancing economic development and the strength and vitality of society, particularly focusing on innovation and enterprise.

Maja moved on to become Head of Higher Education Policy for the London Development

Agency, setting the strategy to fully explore how the higher education community in London contributes to the economy and community. This meant working on a range of projects from giving strategic input and securing funding for new higher education capital developments to co-ordinating cross-London early stage funds for commercialization of research. Many of the practical projects she was involved in saw higher education contributing to areas as diverse as prevention of Thames flooding and looking how latest researchers can contribute to improving Tube cooling systems. She found the projects that she helped fund allowed her to get close to the institutions and to better understand their perspectives and challenges.

Maja then moved to the private sector, working for PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, the professional services company, where she worked with higher education institutions to build and implement strategies and promote robust and good business thinking. This was a great learning opportunity and coincided with a particularly challenging part of the higher education cycle. In more recent times, in response to the economic situation, the work was focused on prioritizing, and creating greater efficiencies in the sector, which helped Maja to gain a real understanding of what higher education institutions need when seeking professional help.

“So, where is the library thread in this story?” asked Maja, and went on to explain that in her previous roles, libraries were not a central theme. However, a wide range of library users have been at the centre of Maja’s work to date, and this will allow her to bring a fresh perspective in her new role in terms of higher education users at the British Library, what they care about, or their attitude to libraries. Maja pointed out that higher education touches the British Library in every aspect, from visitors to the reading room to document delivery. Seventy-five percent of users are from higher education and The British Library underpins much of the excellent research that is carried out in the UK. Maja joins the British Library at a challenging time, when the cost of services and providing them efficiently has never been more important. Maja’s policy and operational background in higher education will stand her in good stead as the British Library strives to provide its services more efficiently.

Maja’s first task in this demanding role is to talk to a lot of people in the sector, including libraries, but also academic researchers, postgraduates and funders of research. She pointed out that you cannot drive plans by yourself – you need to share your collaborative vision with the sector. She is currently looking at different ways and channels for talking and gathering feedback from a complex web of users in higher education.