

## Rhea Keehn, BA Social Policy (2010) : Video profile

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Rhea Keehn describes her experience of studying the BA Social Policy at the University of Birmingham.

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My name's Rhea Keehn, I studied social policy at Birmingham and I currently work as a Governance Policy and Communications Officer in Northampton.

Well studying Social Policy at Birmingham was a fantastic opportunity for me to learn about cause and effect for the things that are happening around us in the world today. I currently use the skills that I learnt from that in my day job, looking at policy, looking at corporate governance, about the organisation and how it works, so really it's opened my eyes into looking at the whole focus of the world and what's going on.

Oh, there are so many fun things at uni for me to remember that I loved. I really enjoyed part of a module in social policy actually volunteering for the Witness Service at Birmingham Magistrates Court. It gave me the opportunity to look at the issues that were happening on the ground in the criminal justice system and trying to understand how policy could be developed to help reduce some of those issues that were happening. And then the other side, I was a member of the Guild of Students and I was very active within that group and got to work with some really talented people and have some great experiences there. So it was quite a few things from my studies and from my extra-curricular stuff.

Well in my first year I was president of Aitken Halls of Residence. That was a real opportunity for me to learn about putting on events and about socials, meeting and listening to the other residents and people that I lived with and also to actually represent them, listen to their issues and represent them to the university to say 'well this is a problem, this is how we can resolve it'. It taught me skills in negotiation and persuasion. Then I took part in various other things throughout my time and then in my final year I stood to become the President of the Guild of Students. I won the election and from there I learnt even more about the workings of the university and wider society, got to stand up for students that were having issues on their course and outside of the university as well, put on even bigger events, more fun things and really just experienced everything that it had to offer.

If you're studying Social Policy, I mean it's a fantastic degree in itself so that's always your first hurdle done because you've chosen something good. But when you're here, I would say look at the opportunities that are around you because the university and the Guild of Students has a whole host of things that you can try out, see what you like, see what you don't like, experience things, see those opportunities and take them because then when you graduate, not only will you have a degree in social policy and understand how the world works, you will know how to apply it because you've experienced all the different things that you can when you're at university.

If you're looking to pursue a career in public office I would suggest that you take your time, have a thick skin, but also listen to the people around you because essentially they're the people that you represent. So you need to understand them, listen to their concerns, understand what things they like, what they don't like and also be true to yourself as well with your own beliefs. Really understand what you value, what you think is right, what you think is wrong and keep pursuing that, listening and learning because there's no right answer to anything. When you're trying to represent people, you're learning just as much from them as much as they're learning from you. It's a very competitive market when you graduate and I think one of the most important things you can take with you from leaving university is experience. If you try all the different things that Birmingham University has to offer, if you go along to the Guild of Students, if you try the different societies, you'll be building up experience before you even know it, doing really fun things like raising money for charity or by doing a hitchhike down to Newquay or putting on an event or a social or standing up for people when they've got an issue. Before you know it, you've got experience. When you go into the marketplace that's what you're taking with you from Birmingham."